APHRODITE

AND OTHER POEMS

JOHN HELSTON

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APHRODITE

AND OTHER POEMS.

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APHRODITE

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

JOHN HELSTON

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1913

E.V.

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J. H.

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LONICERA

THE MAN

This is the hour God goes upon the hills
For vigil, and to watch the western sky. . . .
I doubted not He went there in those days
When you and He were otherwise. . . . And now
We two meet so, nor marvel at the years
That built a temple over my desire,
And made my madness holy that is dust;
That made my soul reverberant, and made
My pulses echo anthems learnt of God. . . .
Whose fault was it that diapason's done?
Whose flaw, that fractured first the tender truth
Of ties that not all of the outer world
In wrath had broken up, nor death destroyed?
Yours—that were in the spirit unashamed
At mean things done disloyal to our love—
Love that is loyal loves not treachery:

I say the spirit's is the parent sin,
If flesh be less than soul for humankind!
There is no respite for a man who loves,
His body knows no stagnant periods;
But, as a tide without an ebb, desire
Flows in upon him ever, unappeased:
Only by consummation comes his calm.
These things came out of chaos with the sun.
Oh yes, Morality! And yet I think
Is Woman's Wit the older word, with more
Of saving grace in it than half the codes
That seek to starve our sex and not to save.
The man who loves may ease a woman's whims
And load himself without her sympathy,
And kneel before her spirit in his own
Bowed by a weight of his unworthiness.
No man is man to lackey vanity
And ask a woman's pardon for his place.
Ungracious women mother many sins. . . .
Bitter? No! Bitterness is past for me.
For me the past is dead and full of dust.
And I, unmoved, have seen her that I loved
Go by with less of light upon her hair
Than on September stubble-fields. With less
Of weariness than wonder now there comes

Her image on me, sometimes, unawares—
Though with the wonder of a poor surprise.
Yet since no man may live and quite forget,
Though where he loved he wooed but his own
dreams,
I still must keep one meaning for my mind
From that old splendour silenced in my heart.
The scent of honeysuckle wakens it:
And once again is summer glorious,
With her old sun-strength ardent, greatly good.
If ever you were glad I loved you, keep
Such gladness fresh with woodbine fragrances,
If so it please you. Something less than joy
Is heartened into ache, if less than pain;
And the dead days are not so dead for me.
This is my only harvest of our love—
To find me wistful at the woodbine flowers.
For I remember how you went with me,
One morning, down the middle of the year. . . .
The long road yet comes grey across the hill
By dense dark woods and shine of ruddy wheat,
Where ruddier poppies hide or take the sun,
And purple knapweeds darkling dream across
The variant gold of bird's-foot trefoil days.

Swifts, like spent arrows glancing from the clouds,
Drift down the wind, high over us: and all
The ways of little streams are half revealed
By fragrant methods of the meadowsweet.
But most the honeysuckle I recall.
It is a land whose likeness mocks our own;
Where August comes to meet us from the hills.
This is your kingdom left you at the last—
Your last of love, where once you had held sway
From my horizons northward, to the south,
And from the sunrise, out beyond the arch
Of the half-sunken sun to solemn things
That have their home behind a sunsetting;
From star-dawn on the sapphire slopes of night,
By midnight's massed momentous quietude,
To lovely latitudes where morning moves
In orient twilight putting out the stars. . . .
I bared my soul before you, having trust;
Without which love goes weakly with slow wings.
Since love that is not free may hardly know
Sweet pride in his own servitude, or choice,
I blame you nowise that a naked soul
Was in your eyes a thing to stimulate

Vain lusts in you and gape of curious men.
But since you did this, so did you destroy
My trust in you; and trust is that in love
Whereby men grow to greater, as men rise
From baseness only having trust in God—
That Purpose men call God, which stands for truth
Whereof is evil known for evil. . . . Now,
It seems, you would regain your empery?
You, who have with your own hands shorn away
Such dignity as might a sin-soiled man,
From power of passion's purifying fire,
Forge as a sceptre meeter made for love. . .
Stand near a little! Let me search your eyes
If I may read a hunger there that shames
Some semblance of its shadow into mine. . . .
For I have seen on long-forgotten trails
Old hounds, half blind, that rummaged in the weeds,
Hunt mute a hundred paces and give tongue—
A whimper that awakes from out their blood
On who-knows-what old phantom quest; cast back,
And troubled, stare above their heavy haws
At far dim fields, and hearken echoings

Of memories running strongly. Once I sought,
As all men on their hunting days must go,
Perforce, to find a mate and make them mad. . . .
Who knows I now may chance on some old trail
Of passion, that was you in other years?
I say I cannot cross the woodbine's zone
But I pick up a line that leads to you. . . .
Because of that far off behind-the-hedge,
Where not more fragrant was the woodbine blown
Upon my senses than your sun-warm hair. . . .
I climbed through thorns and gathered of the flowers.
And I had climbed. . . . I might have gathered *you.*
I saw your soul there to my hand that day;
And all your body brushed me like a fire
Of August suns that strikes a field of wheat
Hotly, with sudden passion, under clouds. . . .
I would not cross a field to seek you now—
This is the saddest thing of love, I think.
Before, I would have sought you through the world. . . .

"A law of life, all moral laws above—
Who breaks shall surely scourge him with
a rod:
Whoso shall offer insult unto love
Shall spit upon the very face of God."

So I have heard, and likewise this for truth:—
This is the hell of women, to have slain,
Not as the splendid wantons of old time—
Hot-mouthed, so even lust was eloquent
With raptured immolation—love's desire,
But on the altar of their meaner moods,
Vainglorious promptings, braggart self-conceits,
And that cheap pride of cheaper modesty
Mouthing a lover's passion for the praise
Of idle ears, and turning tender trust
To vulgar tribute: modesty that craves
Envy from other women while it scorns,
As things immodest, franker unrestraint
Of women quick to love and quick to own. . . .
There is no heaven lovers may not climb
With the strong pulse of two-fold passion blent
In psychic pinions Godward, nor no hell
So deep that Love may hide his dead away
Among its nadir-night of mocking stars,

That haunt like ghosts what love might else have
been. . . .
Such reverence as man may give was yours
Freely. I knew no higher God than Love,
Nor needed any. Now is Reverence
Done to such death as no dog ever died.
And when you lied against my love there died
Something, in flower, that will not bloom again.
Remains, one day among ripe harvest-lands—
I may not lose its mocking memory.
You would not lose it also? So, you say?
Well, since Love levies, like an overlord,
Tribute of every season, if you crave
The arid harvest of defeat and drouth,—
If you are fain for fruit of bitterness,
We two needs make but pilgrimage along
The smiling margins of that Dead-Sea place.
Abele trees whiten every wind, and there
Love walks, *in sepulchretis,* by the corn.
And by the corn the honeysuckles blow:
Whilst August brings the lengthening night; and
sweet
The great green Mother's peace is and her rest
Until her lord shall turn to her again.
We, who have never mixed us, well may meet

And turn once more by unforgetful ways;
(Belike the Traveller's Joy remembers us
In some warm-scented corner of those lands)
With quiet eyes fulfil a destiny—
Grave-watchers of resurgent death-in-love. . . .
Tomorrow then? Now go—before the night,
That settles eastward hard upon our tracks,
Rises and clothes the ways before us, as behind.
It's strange that now the west is over dark
For all its crimson; while the east, for all
Its sable shade, gleams like a broad blue flower.
No man, it seems, may bridle so his blood
Some shadow may not start it from his hand.
Since love is over for us I would lust
In nowise for you—*why,* I hardly know.
I loved you with my body and my soul:
My body sinned, I think, for weariness
Of passion striving hard with hopeless things.
But in my soul there was more purity
Than had sufficed to keep me clean for you,
Had you been less ungracious. Now that love
Is over for us I would near his grave
With none of impious passion in my heart,
But with clear eyes, though eyes that cannot
weep,

Calm thoughts,—perhaps with flowers of woodbine flung
Before his last sole shrine. Therefore I say
Go from me *now,* a hungry man in this—
I may not stand beside you in the dark:
Ghosts are revealed of night as well as stars;
And troubled spirits, of its quietude. . . .
She's gone. . . . God! how this dark hedge breathes of her!
I would her soul were half as sweet to me.

. . . . .
. . . . .
. . . . .

This morning finds your mood unchanged? I thought
You would repent you of last night's desire.
Since you have still the same mind on this thing,
What shall be said between us? . . . Going grey?
Yes, long ago. *You* have not altered much—
Excepting that one alteration Time
Had hardly wrought with all his change of years. . . .
Some cloud and sun the morning promises,

Wind from the south-west, but no rain, I think;
The same as was that morning long ago.

THE WOMAN

It rained that day. . . .

THE MAN

Oh?

THE WOMAN

Once. Behind the hedge;
While you were at the honeysuckle. I
Looked up and felt great drops that splashed like tears
Twice on my face. I kissed you, afterwards,
When you had done with gathering flowers for me. . . .

THE MAN

You can remember that . . . and yet you lied,
Like spiteful women lie, to wound a man—
Snakewise—and dragged my love about the streets;
Like men for whom is tender trust almost
A thing as worthy confidence as tavern friends
Stooping with beer in bars at closing-time! . . .

Here is the train, we need not ride together
If you prefer to be alone.

THE WOMAN

Thanks: no.
Alone with you if possible. I would
Drink to the dregs this day you dedicate
To calm (I think that was the adjective)
Thoughts, and to such of seemlier obsequies
As may redeem us from the vulgar end
Of our dead love. . . . Go on, and spare me not.
Say she you loved had no real part in me—
A snob, whose other name you told to stars,
Until the vestry dust-cart came and cried:
"Your goddess was ungracious, and a liar,
And girdled with a ten-fold vanity!" . . .
Perhaps some mental and some psychic growth
Had followed—love, they say, works miracles—
Without a disproportionate display
Of vanity. Who knows?—the latter might have shrunk,
Nay, might have dwindled down when deeper things

Were round us: when the streams of our two lives
Fused in the star-fire on the outer deep
I might have lost the beacon on the hill
By no more miracles than latitude,
Wider horizons, solitude *a deux;*
Nor needed other solace under stars. . .
I was ungracious, now I will not be:
Miracle-methods it shall be for us!
For *you,* I mean. Your love had cast them out—
(With certain small concessions made, what time
The necessary grace had wrought in me)
The seven devils of my self-esteem.
And I had learnt me more of truth and trust. . . .
No! I will have it so—*miraculous.*
(Thanking you kindly, sir, for your dissent.)
Why not? Strange things are not so rare; and once
Two different baker's carts went by our house,
Nor one gold medal had they, 'twixt the two.
Bitter? No. Bitterness is past for me!
I was but learning truth—and graciousness.
Good precepts reach apt scholars readily,
'Tis dunces add up evil on their thumbs.

THE MAN

Forgive yourself, and *me*—through you! . . .
My faith,
Once gone in you, went badly like a thief
Who, running wild for months about the woods,
Hides first from fear, but afterwards he hides
Less from his fear than his distrust of men.
You lost your power to hold me, when you lied,
But when you stooped to that I learnt distrust
Of my own senses—deemed you less than you
(As once through lover's eyes I deemed you more)
In all things else. And since it is that hate
But languishes on foods that feed contempt,
Hate left no heir within my heart but dust:
Not good to fight on; albeit I fought. Success
(I rose in spite of, not because of, you)
Had dust and ashes on it when it came.
There have been days—September-toned—when I
Have felt the sun's peace mock me, and night-times
Of dark trees' commune under cloudy stars,
I would we might have shared for punishment
All dust and ashes, rather than, alone,

That I found Elysium-fruited Fame
Or bliss of Gods. . . . Contempt is like a cloud
For men who make the sun a sign for truth:
They see it stain the heavens, from afar,
Nor heed it hides the sun from other eyes.
But when they *feel* it all the world is changed
About them. So I deemed you base in all. . . .
Men judge too harshly where they once have loved.
But this extenuation will I claim—
Were I a shameless liar to the world,
For very shame I would not lie to you. And if
Eternity and Gods have left for us,
And for our planet's pastures feeding souls,
Ideals of a market-place supreme,
Where none may live by Truth alone, but starve;
If Manhood's mind be Falsehood's, and the liar
The last achievement of the solar years,
I say I had felt shame to lie *to you!*
Ungracious that I harp on this? Not so.
I do but seek a reason for my scorn—
For whose scorns, without, condemns himself,
And not the thing he tries. . . . And yet a doubt

Comes. . . . that my love was less than wonderful?
Belike no man may love as women do?
Helen of my mythology had more
Of Fable's truth than all the towers of Troy:
My lady *breathed*—but as a lady's-maid!
I said these things; and scornful died my love.
Had I loved on and been the better man?

THE WOMAN

Neither the better nor the worse—a man:
Men do not love as women do. We love,
And do defiances, iconoclasms,
Against our god, who is a jealous god
Beyond the God of Moses,—wilfully.
And having slain a lover, love him more.
But men love women for their better selves. . . .
Or for our bodies. Women love for this,
We live for love; and more than once have died
For men whose very baseness mocks the beast.
Grown wanton to the lips as Jealousy
A woman well may lie to hurt a man
And lose her soul to heal him afterwards. . . .
But here's the place—the old church through the trees.
Should we be married there, you said. We'll go

And watch the wedded sleeping side by side.
We ne'er shall sleep so now, or afterwards.
I would know all the lessons learnt from love
On that last pallid page where, darkling, flowers
The purple plant of pleasure's plenilune—
Solanum dulcamara—wordlessly.
We may forget his April light, forget
His middle-madness stronger than the moon
On ardent eyelids kissed in summer leaves;
The nightshade stings our memories to tears.
Because we knew no middle sweetness Love
Is like to deal us more of bitterness,
Or so it strikes a woman. . . . and a man?

THE MAN

Perhaps men are more weak albeit more strong,
And therefore dig their graves the deeper. Men
Shed curses on the tombs of their dead loves
Where women go more quietly to weep. . . .
The place is painful in its peace, but stay
If you would further. . . . He was ninety-two:
Helen, *his* wife, came here—a year before.
I wonder when they left off loving. See,
She bore him children in her nineteenth year.
Their firstborn, yonder, grew to be a man,

And left off living early—twenty-one.
No doubt they put that rose-bush by his head,
With shaking hands that touched beneath the mold.
Who knows he knew what love was, otherwise?
He sleeps no less the sounder. . . . Time we went, you say?
Yes. It is some few miles—out there. The sun
Is shining on the shadow of the woods
That lie around the corn-lands where it grows. . . .
Woodbine or woody-nightshade, take your choice.

THE WOMAN

I think you could be cruel to me to-day. . . .
I am a woman, spare me not, but strike—
I struck you long ago. Now take revenge.
Love is the cruellest of things alive.
We shall not live for ever, punish me!

THE MAN

You wrong me. I would comfort. No, you're right!
I will not go like this towards a tomb—

This tiger thing that creeps along my blood
To spring and lust across love's resting-place. . . .
Oft since that day we crowned you with a kiss
The lady of my heart, by yonder wheat,
(They planted wheat again, I see, this year)
I have in spirit watched these lands. As one
Who on high hills at evening stands at gaze—
To trace his journeys of the day and mark
Some belt of far old woodland hiding streams
Whereat he drank, and after, lying down,
Dreamed some divine-born daughter of the woods
Looked with soft eyes upon a son of men. . . .
Or through a sunset for your bridal-veil
You watch, as women do a lover's road
At evening tryst. But these are deadly dreams. . . .
Here suzerainty for you is and ends,
Who once were queen of "all my nights and days."
And no man dares do outrage on his queen,
In hours like this, for very fear of shame.
I will not with concupiscence discrown
The last poor remnant left me of my love.

Rather I would go calmly by your side
And be at peace with you and all the world,
And if that peace be painful—go in pain,
Than with the pulse of passion lacking love.

THE WOMAN

Yes? You rebuke me now—from out your blood,
Because you praised me out of passion—*then.*
Praise sweet to me; and blame, its aftermath,
Is only less because the passion's less:
I will not utter falsehood *now.* . . . But no!
Your sovereign lady (speaking for the past)
Comes from her throne to guide you graciously;
All truth in her, and such humility
As well befits a queen before a grave.
Her sceptre's shadow points her punishment—
Take back your lust: go with me like a *friend.*

THE MAN

Yes, Helen, let us go as friends to-day. . . .
The same hedge: that white poplar by the road,
Watching its long grey solitude for toll
Of vagrant winds, that passing pay their tune
Of silver music wanly in the leaves.

And over it—look—high against the clouds,
The thin black wings that glance along the sky. . . .
Once past this oak wood and the wheat begins.
Men must come here, and yet—a motorcar
A mile or so this side of Romanhurst—
The legions might have gone but yesterday,
There seem so few of dwellers in the land! . . .
How the downs dream through long grey distances—
Their very combes are full of sleep. . . . See here!
Here's the old field, and, further on, the path
Between the wood of ashes and the corn.
Forgive the sorry pun. . . . Yes, sweet and thick,
As in that other August, there it climbs—
Its fairy fragrance woven through the wind. . . .
I will go first: the thorns have overgrown
The entrance to the path. So here we stand!
Now I will gather for you once again—
From this same plant that reaching through the thorns
Climbs on across the years, beyond our love.
There! Some few sprays for each of us to cast

In votive fashion, where we stood and kissed,
Before the shrine of fruitless. . . . why! *In tears?*
There is no rain to-day! You never wept,
Before. Your eyes were always somewhat cold—
Yet some such natures have been fierce with love. . . .
No! you and I had best not kiss again. . . .
How the sun fires the wind across the corn.

THE WOMAN

Love me a little—half a day—an hour!
Is it so hard to love? I *know* that once
You loved me without learning. Let the trees
Teach you what I, whom once you loved, may not—
Some trick, some semblance, every shadow learns
From the reality that casts it forth;
Nor are the shadows all unreal—am I? . . .
You may not? So? You would not act untruth?
I think is woman's wit then all unknown
In women that have lost a lover! *You*—
Yours be the liar's part now. . . . not because

You *may* not do this thing. . . . that's not the word!
You *will* not! Why? And Why's a woman, too:
I hate her. . . . oh, I hate her well enough!
She would not stoop to lie against her love,
Oh no! *She's* worth your trust! She would forgive—
Being nobler—though you sinned a hundred times!
You came to-day to sin here, in your *heart,*
With one who was not worth your love, and blamed
(Being so greatly honest) an *effect,*
Lest in a clamant cause your own desire
Cried Hypocrite upon you! Oh my God!
Oh God, who made us women! . . .

THE MAN

Don't, I say!
Our love is dead between us, at your hands:
Were you as God you might not waken it.
If there be sin within my heart, I craved
Your help to. . . .

THE WOMAN

Keep you clean of me for her!
You sinned with other women, loving *me:*
That you deceived me nowise, though you wronged,
Has given you into my hands. Now go to *her,*
(The spirit's is the parent sin, you said)
Say, "I have sinned in spirit against your love.
Forgive me!" Do not doubt she will forgive:
She would forgive you, so, a hundred times!
Now sin with me *in earnest*—once, no more:
Say, "Lo, I met a wanton in the woods,
And in the woods lay down with her and sinned."
Then ask forgiveness, ask a hundred times,
And see if *she* forgive you for *one* sin! . . .
Shameless? I lost respect of yours, and yet—my love,
For all I hate you now, is not so poor
That I may not regain it, by a sin!
I say you dare not mix with me and say
That you despise me *then.* Despise yourself,
Hate me like hell the moment after: yes!
Despise me, no! That is the way of men,

For men love women for their better selves—
Or for our bodies. Love my body, *now:*
Henceforth you may despise me ne'er again.
This is your love I sinned against and slew
By vanity and some ungraciousness:—
My body may restore respect I lost;
And yet the spirit's is the parent sin!
Though you should hate me I may have respect:
You loved me till—I threw respect away!

THE MAN

It seems I did not love you then at all?
I worshipped you as something worthy such,
And finding you were other, lost my love.
What is your moral? That even the lower love
Has in it more than reverence may know?
It may be. For the god that Moses knew
Becomes a nonsense name to thinking men.
But when love goes we'll say God help the world!
Yet, since you women say you live for love. . . .

THE WOMAN

Will, kiss me once. . . . and you shall go to her!
You loved me, yes, you loved me! I forgave
Each sin, in secret, though they maddened me.

Who knows you loved me more than. . . . more
than. . . . I—
I never loved you as I love you now
When hate is more than iron in my soul. . . .
A-h! . . . Oh, my dear, my lost one! Comfort
me!
Let me but live this day out! Hark, the wind
Sinks to a whisper, and the wheat is full
Of murmurs and insidious desire. . . .
No, now you shall not go to her. . . . but go—
Just you and I together, hand in hand,
Into deep woods and hide us and forget,
Forget all things but this one day. Yes, yes,
Kiss me a hundred times beneath this oak—
'Twill last our lives out, like the tree! Say now,
"Helen I love you!" Though it be a lie
It is an echo of the greatest truth
The years have ever taught me. . . . Oh, my
dear,
Let me but breathe a moment. Now again! . . .
My darling, I have dreamed I was your wife,
Ere my fool-folly drove you from my side,—
Let all things dreamed and done be in your kiss!
I am grown old in longing; make me young.

The years roll back. . . . that August long ago. . . .
See, I will lay this woodbine in my breast. . . .
Kiss my two eyes first—blind me, both my hands,
And—all things teaching two-fold tenderness. . . .
I am not shameless to your lips? My blood,
Afire to feel the homage of your own,
Makes me yet beautiful enough for praise
Of those same lips that scorned me long ago?
I well had lost—had lost a hundred times—
Respect of yours, had I but kept your love,
Though it be such of love as. . . . How I blush—
To say I am not shameless, from my heart!
And this wild flower that brought you back to me—
Who knows?—my heart may wither ere it dies.
You would not leave me now—until the dark?
How dark it is among these leaves; and, listen,
A stream comes here to murmur. . . . Yes, my love,
I will not fail you now, and live, ah no!
I failed you of my folly in the past,
And wisdom when it reached me came too late

To save me then, or you. This is our hell,
The chiefest hell of woman—to have been loved,
And to have failed her man—the man she loved.
For women love but once in all their lives
With their full strength of loving. And for you—
The woman that I was not was your mate
Though you should wed a dozen! I was proud,
As I am humble, even for your lust.
Yet have I so much pride as women hoard
For exorcisms when their changing blood
Conjures a ghostly guerdon from the grave
Of love self-slain:—the woman I was not
Had more of your love than another may:
I have no choice, but glory in my greed.
My barren kingdom, where I kindled scorn
In votive places where you worshipped love,
Is yet not quite so laid waste but I know
It was *my own* though all its temples pass.
No other may depose me though I reign
Among waste dust of shadow-shaken lands.
For me, such penalty of loneliness
As comes from the soul-coffers of a queen;
And, though your soul be unafraid of death
As unafraid of living out the years,

This be exacted of you: Had you been
Of nobler stuff than many men be yet,—
Had you but had the patience of old pain,—
I had been slave of yours—as much a slave
As fire is to the four winds of the world;
Nay, rather, as a flame, had clave to *you,*
Though all the hate of both the hemispheres
Had torn all shelter from you save my arms! . . .
You *loved* me—not as traders do their tills—
Had you forgiven me the pride of fools,
The vice of liars, only—only that!
Now this must meet you, guised as Memory
With some unhealed old trouble in the eyes:—
You shall escape the woman that was not,
And turning on your tracks, say, "Where is she?
I did but fly a wraith of hollow dust!"
And lo, in lonely places she will stand,
As women for forgiveness, who are proud,
When all their pride goes over to their love.
Then shall you dimly—as through dust, maybe—
See far off, firelight-shadowed things that forge
At his, Love's own, immortal fires and streams,
Armour of proof, and perfect-fashioned faith,
Large trust, and fearless flawless happiness

Where The Soul welds two beings into one. . . .
I am grown greedy of our separate lives
Of punishment. Yet, since 'twas I that failed
(Though I would have you, rather than forget,
Sicken with dust of ashes in your heart)
I am grown eager for that ecstasy
Of penitential passion women crave.
I would you were one dead, I think, at times,
Whose eyes my hands, unseen, had closed for ever—
Glad with the grief of jealousy. I hate you still—
Just hate, apportioned for my punishment:
Hatred whose lineaments are like to Love's
Of the imperfect creature—less than hate
As the far less than love. My love, my love,
We might have grown together, vein for vein!
Crowned every day with tender nights of stars;
And ruled, as one, o'er realms whose wonderment
Had made each city street a Parthenon! . . .
This only now is left me—penitence:
I lead me to that ghost-walk of regret
Where "love" asks *now,* and thanks me from the past.

God knows what taught you love then. You have taught
What love might have been for us, since, to me.
In this dim place I will do sacrifice.
You shall not save me from myself: you cared
Too little in the past to save for you
The woman that you dreamed I might have been—
Yet who puts faith in dreams? But teach me now
To be all humble, since nor man nor woman,
Has so much pride they must not bow the knee—
It may be to some secret god of theirs.
In this dim place I will do sacrifice—
I say you shall not save me. . . .

THE MAN

Helen, this—
This makes you mine for ever. . . . I would give. . . .
I would I could give man's equivalent,
But there is none. . . . I know you generous—
It is the first time, but I *know* it now.
And yet love is beyond me—that is truth.
That I would lust for you now is truth also—
Yet shame is sharp within me, none of joy:

I doubt we know a meaning for these things.
Unless it be there is no good but love,
And all things done for love's sake are good things. . . .
Once I had more of happiness to gather flowers
For you, than to pluck all my pleasures now
Out of you so. We came for honeysuckle—
For woodbine we may gather in the dark,
Nightshade, and haply of the deadlier kind. . .
Sin is the sorrowfullest of things alive:
Yet now I care for nothing but to sin—
There is no peace for me but penitence.

THE WOMAN

"With quiet eyes fulfil a destiny."
Your words—and once you loved me! This I know,
That men and women may love many times—
With little hurt or harm in it as love:
Nor bruise each other more than willow trees
That scarce may touch in shadow on a stream.
But where *some* men and women love, they *hate*
At least one lurid life of night and day
When Hell usurps their heavens and desires.
But mostly 'tis the woman hates the man;
Until the knife is sharp enough to wound.

She strikes; and turns it in the flesh; and feels
The poison of his passion in her side
For vengeance on her. 'Tis but evidence
Of truth, that in all sweets a poison lurks
When taken to repletion. And the soul
Is never poor that may be passionate;
Nor passion quite so poor as not to crave
Among the margins of The Infinite
Satiety insatiate. . . . I do not doubt
Imagination is the caste of souls. . . .
And when such women love such men they lose
Hatred at last, and after hatred, life,
Or ever they may lose their love again.
For these there is no peace in life unless
Each gets to each and mixes love with love
Beyond the shallow waters of the world,
And lips feed lips with fire wherein are fused
The inner heats that melt Eternity
Each side the Present. The imagination
Is but the flame of myriad molten suns
Loosed from the slow retorts of stellar time—
A protoplasm for the mind of man,
That, taking thought, transcends a planet's
wings. . . .
For these women are nights and days and years

But as are trees along a ruined road
That is not lonely so one other walks—
Though it be on some far off stretch, with seas between,
Yet ever drawing nearer. Afterwards—
When they have met athirst, and gone aside
Into waste lands where only starlight comes,
And there flung off restraint, and mingled there,
And made their peace more piteous for kind words
Above old wounds of their own hate—there comes
Great loneliness of parting. But the sun,
Linking the stealthy footways of the dark,
Shines not so bright as their own sign of "sin"
Henceforth—though they should never meet again. . . .
There is no peace for me unless we "sin,"
Though there be none for either afterward.
Since no such woman *mates* her save with him,
Though she have husbands more than one in life,
That in her soul acknowledged is for lord,
For whom her body bondslave is and glad,
My life is less than this my marriage-night
Though I should live a century of years.

God save me afterwards, we'll say. *You* save
me now!
I have set all my being like a star
This night shall waken to white flame, to burn
My very heart out, spendthrift on the dark.
My hour comes on triumphant! I thank God—
For power to "sin," and lose my soul, may-
be! . . .
Not *she* can keep you from me for this night—
Though she, being nobler, will forgive the
sin. . . .
For now I know this thing for truth in us:—
Unless we mix together, at the last,
Though we be long past loving, it shall rise
Intolerable beyond the darks of death,
And Memory shall do murder ere we pass.
Either we two are destined to deny
Our hearts' one truth of nightshade-nurtured
need,
Or to live, die, above all Destiny—
Saying, "What need have we of any gods:
The world has paid for gods an hundredfold
In tears and bloody tribute!" GOD himself—
Can in nowise conceal this truth in us:—

No peace is for us two unless we "sin!"
Though there be Hell hereafter. Man made gods
To make poor men more patiently afraid,
And murdered Truth to make a mountebank—
Fit emblem for the thing Morality.
But for such gods had men long since thrown off
The incubus of Mammon's incest. Now
They rise at last and do their gods to death.
They do these things. It may be they are right. . . .
I learnt to lie from childhood up, in church,
Small wonder that I grew to tolerate
A thing acclaimed as holy! You forgave—
You could not, nor can I, *forget* I lied
Against our love. Now gladly I forget
God, and forgive him! He must need, by this,
Mankind's forgiveness badly! In his name
We have been taught to worship Compromise
Not for its *truth* but for its cowardice.
Ere this night closes I will crown by "sin"
The one high and indomitable truth
That comes to flower upon my soul, as stars
Above dark tides. I know no God but Love,

Now. Since you showed me Him, though through my tears,
Take your reward in all your will of me!
See, how the setting sun has sanctified
The woods, and put a passion in your face
To consecrate the latent soul men see
In sunsets! Oh, my dear, I do not doubt
Forgotten dust lies under these still woods,
That once stood here together while the night
Came darkling in across those eastern hills.
Dust that was living lovers, long apart,
That crept together here, and panting clung
Their night out to the chill verge of the dawn
When day meant death; and when the day was come,
Would part no more, but laughed and took their death,
And clung their night of ages out. But now
Men do not love in such wise; but they love
Their women for an hour, maybe a year,
Though all their life they well may love a horse
To ruin; or if they should strike a ball
Some score of yards beyond another man
They die content. . . . No, now we will not talk,

But wait my hour. The yearning of the dark
Is over us already. . . . I would I had
(Forgive me now such woman's fantasies)
A handful of my own wild woodbine flowers
From out the hedge. Will, gather once again
For me—my bridal-flowers; I will await
Their coming and my lord's, within the sound
Of that small stream I may not see but hear.
Its broken voice of whispers I shall hear
Henceforth through life. Maybe, when I am old,
I still shall find it singing if I come:
I *must* come here again before I die.
But once, I think: no more: when I am old. . . .
No, dear, we cannot miss: be quickly gone,
And quicker back to me. Well, kiss me then! . . .

* * * * * * *

Thanks, dear! No, I will *kiss* my thanks. . . .
Why, Will!
What is it? Tell me, dear! Tell me, I say!
Why is your face so white and full of. . . .
tears?
My darling, have no fear for me! My "sin" . . .

THE MAN

Let be! No talk of sin, Helen, for us!
I found more things than woodbine by the hedge:
Love. . . .

THE WOMAN

L-o-v-e?

THE MAN

And great fear: but no more sorrowing
For the dead past and all its loneliness. . . .
Though fledged with flight of slow unhappy years,
Love had won. . . .

THE WOMAN

L-o-v-e?

THE MAN

home to his darkened shrine.
And lo, the fragrance of his incense waked
From every flower: first, like to fear, and then—
Like to such joy as I have never known,

So strong it left me stricken. And the flowers
I clutched at as do drowning men at straws
They tell of. . . . then I stumbled back to you.
Love has come back. . . .

THE WOMAN

L-o-v-e?

THE MAN

Love—to save us both!
Good God! Get up, girl, don't kneel down to *me!*
There, there, that's better! Kiss me! Kiss the flowers,
Rather. No need of any nightshade now,
For you or me, my Helen! . . . Ah, I feared
'Twould be too much for you, my dear. Lie still. . . .
You will not loose those flowers again awhile.
How cold her hard-shut hand is. It's a swoon,
Of course. . . . My God! can it be. . . . Christ! not *death.*
Helen, speak to me! Helen! Fool I was—
I choked with it; and now her wilful heart. . . .

Yes, yes, dear! You're all right? Eh? Yes, *alive.*
My woodbine-bride! My darling. . . .

THE WOMAN

Hush. . . . the stars!

IN A GARDEN

THE WOMAN

I came away, and soothed my soul with stars
And that pale crescent harp up there that hangs,
Filled of dumb music, 'mid the cedar tree.
I am grown sick and weary of it all!
The dirty lusts of calumny and spite
That crave and feed excitements slanderous!
Are these things men and women that we meet?—
Creatures with sentient souls; or mountebanks
Who train themselves to bow and scrape for hire,
Pay debts of food and drink with compliments,
Or cultivate with airs the great inane,
Or train their tongues to move as serpents crawl?
Bah! I am sick and weary of it! When
That woman gorging on dead singing-birds,

Between her mouthfuls, mocked me with a smile
For my defence of Joan's lapse from grace,
I could have struck her like some drunken drab
Aroused to tavern vixenhood. That thing!
That harlot for a husband's sweated gold
Wrung from the lives of starving women's toil!
I hate her! and I hate them all, and. . . .

THE MAN

Me?
I think the starry sedative you sought
Has proved but ineffectual anodyne?

THE WOMAN

I humbly crave your pardon, good my lord!
It is not meet that women should be heard!
Your pardon, good my lord, for feeling shown!
Words impolite, and worse than impolite—
Vulgar with warmth of feeling!

THE MAN

Hush, my *dear*. . . .

THE WOMAN

I am your dear? Oh yes! I am your dear!

THE MAN

I think you women have gone sudden mad
With liberty to scan the planes of life,
Yet lacking fit adjustment of the brain
To view in true perspective anything!

THE WOMAN

Ah! I have roused you, good my lord, at last!
We two have been engaged for near a month—
Yet beat me not, I pray you till we wed! . . .
I cynical? Who taught us cynicism,
Hypocrisy, and dirty little lies?

THE MAN

I think you do not mean to be unkind
But that within you is some strange unrest
That marriage will allay. . . .

THE WOMAN

Or make revolt,
The more relentless for a garb of smiles
To greet my lord's acquaintances and beam
With placidly enthusiastic eyes
(You praise my eyes, or did in by-gone days)

Upon the miracles that Jones has wrought. . . .
Red-coated men that hammer little balls.
He holed in two, ye gods, he holed in two!
And still the stars swing on around their pole.
How Brown at bridge—but Brown at bridge
should awe
And hush the splendours of a million stars:
I sometimes think Brown is the greater man!

THE MAN

I think you women have gone sudden mad! . . .
Fools that you are, who, born to rule a world
Through flesh of your own nurture, bring forth
flies,
A fume of empty words,
For fretful buzzing in the market-place!
Above vain theories, whose windy life
Is flatulent with growths of ignorance.
In that you, seeking evil for complaint,
Deem all things evil that may e'er refute
The vanity of Egotism's vast receipts
To mend a world by claiming what should be,
And only be, and not at all what *is*,
Had you the makings of a universe!

THE WOMAN

Whence comes this tone, O good my future lord?
I, who have taught me dignity by deeds,
And calm repose as Beauty's highest crown,
From your allusions to some stateliness.
Perchance I may now learn corollary—
Some silence that is wooden—from the saw
That "silver speech" and "golden silence" hold.
But no! Henceforth no more hypocrisy,
Whose other name's Convention. I will stand
Henceforth for woman's freedom like a. . . .
like. . . .
Our theories are saner than your own!
I am not dumb: I have some intellect.

THE MAN

Think you that man will love an intellect
As man loves woman? Think you he will strive
The nobler in the press of life if you,
Seeing injustice to your sex in things,
Add to the fret of battle arguments
On abstract ethics—conjuring a gale
Of wordy war to scatter thistledown?

THE WOMAN

I. . . .

THE MAN

Send out your emissaries, search the world
From where the north's white silence quickening feels
Reflections of mysterious gleams and glows,
To frozen tumults of Antarctic seas
Congealed beneath the night of southern Cold.
You shall not meet one creature of such kind,
Far less a race of men,—upon itself
By Intellect begotten!

THE WOMAN

I. . . .

THE MAN

Take heed!—
Apostates from a creed that Nature taught
Her daughters through long ages of a world;
And, for a sign that they may ne'er forget,
Ordained her rites of sacrificial pain
Through all the seasons of a woman's year.

THE WOMAN

I say that. . . .

THE MAN

Sex is no more than a name
That dwells in text-books on First Principles,
Or definition for Creation's law!
And not the vital principle of Life itself,
Girt with the memories of a million springs,
Robed with the star-shot raiment of the dusk
That hung in sympathy about a myriad loves,
To weave its spells of starry pattern o'er
The duller warp and woof of human lives!

THE WOMAN

I. . . .

THE MAN

Phantom illusory of poets' brains!
Whose refutations walk the world to-day
In garish irony, for you to point
A moral—even men who live as swine
And wallow in a slough of sensual mire:
Yet stay—are women always noble, pure?

THE WOMAN

I want. . . .

THE MAN

The shadow for the substance, so:
Scoff at man's love then: from its idle dreams
Turn to Equality of Sex, and Equal Rights
To fashion laws that you can not enforce.
You whose allotted task, to fashion men,
Was once the primal duty; now no more,
Since higher destinies have bridged the gulf
That yawned between your so-called slavery
And Freedom's soil, where party factions breed
Sufficient offspring.

THE WOMAN

You won't let me speak. . . .

THE MAN

The right to have a word in everything!
There lies no selfishness nor greed; no thought
Of anything but Justice—sexless, pure!
The liberty to rave, because the world
Is not as you would have it! Ere you claim
Authority in all things, pause awhile,
And humbly learn the lessons of your own!
You have a kingdom: yes, in very truth

You have! Does no injustice dwell therein?
Is man sole tyrant in the scheme of things?
Have you no better work in those your realms,
No higher duty to your sex—to man?
Or does your treatment of each other show
Such pure example that a world shall crave
Initiation in your precepts—means
Whereby it reach salvation and the stars?
Or are you cravens shrinking from the toll
That you must pay to nature and your kind? . . .
Twin Elementals every healthy male
Combines within his soul—the need of strife,
And need of rest within a woman's arms.
Cross him and vex, or flout him with the jeers
Of sexless egotism, he will find
Such comfort as a harlot's arms may yield.
Who then shall benefit? Though you made laws,
As many as the webs that bind the blades
Of autumn grasses, they should stay him not,
And hinder him as little! Take you heed,
Lest too much zeal for freedom should infect
Him, with a freedom brooking no restraint!
Pause ere you talk of justice, there are things—
There are some laws writ in no statute book,

That spring from ethics little as the sun;
Yet as the sun all potent to command
The spheres they dominate, and as the sun
Essential for the equipoise of things
Of human as of planets' energy. . . .
Or think you that, by simply taking thought
Among yourselves, a higher destiny
Than Motherhood you can evolve? Perhaps
You can invent a system for all time,
Of such perfection, that by power of vote
You shall ordain that Inequality
Shall cease, and Human Nature yield its store
Of age-accumulated instincts, claims,—
Because to maiden womanhood may seem
Gross things of passion and impurity,
And virtue only in emasculate!
Who, seeing Love afar off as a star
Clothed in pale fire of purity ineffable,
Forgets that stars have shadows, closer seen. . . .
Now I have done didactics, and would find
The lover once again—for all your hate!
Me also do you hate, my lady fair?
For fair you are—amid this place of stars,
And in this dusk of old-world yews, more fair,

Perhaps, than ever woman ought to be!
Seeing that men are mortal flesh and blood
And in their veins are stored a myriad stars
And memories of innumerable moons,
Whereunder man has wooed his way through time.

THE WOMAN

Why did. . . . why did you not to me before
Give of your poetry? You fed my love
With compliments, as lap-dog loves are fed!

THE MAN

Not poetry—but only rhetoric.
Yet answer me. What answer rhetoric
Shall draw from you, unprompted aught of Love,
Who would betray all judgments with a kiss?

THE WOMAN

I think that its own echoes answers are.
On many points with equal justice could
We women most of *man*kind well arraign. . . .
And for your blessed word to beat us with,

To awe us into meek obedience—
You talk of Strength as if it were a sword,
That only man may handle. I know not
If men were men by virtue of their strength;
Or haply, if were men as elephants
Our sense of Right, our souls, our loves, might be
Ten-fold as powerful. If Justice be
A child of body's strength I do not know.
Or if that are his offspring, Mind and Soul. . . .

"And she who bare him, yet shall beacon him,
When blinded of the brute that is in Force,
Towards a Strength whose eyes are never dim
With worshipped wonders, trifles to the horse."
I hold him more a man whose soul is strong
Than Hercules without one; as I hold
A poet greater than a pugilist. . . .
I never guessed you poet till to-night.

THE MAN

Such poet's hand as touched it was but Love's:
Love makes all men as poets, though he makes
Their music sometimes mute.

THE WOMAN

It is not Love!—
Not Love's the fault! Oh no! It is their own!
I think we creatures of this latter day. . . .
Hypocrisy's a canker in our hearts.
We two have spoken much as grocers deal—
Have weighed our words and wrapped them; and with string
Clipped from Conventions hanging over us
Taught Love to trade, as they apprentices!
Taught him, who should have taught us poetry—
And poetry that helps our souls to grow
To saner, larger life than clods' or clowns'.
We stifle souls, and mouth moralities;
And bind us with swaddling-bands of codes:
To be correct in all things, and to prove
Futility God's word, Development.
We clamour for improvements made of mind,
And silence all complainings of our souls.
I think some higher kind of anthropoid
Might do as well with training. . . . Yet you wrong—
We women are but drawing swords for Love!
For love of man seems in this latter day

To be a thing of gifts from hand and brain.
Things potent to command our hearts to love?
Then such love is but harlot like a bride;
And a chimera, nothing more—the soul. . . .
And for your talk of old-world wisdoms: Man—
Were "Ancestors" his one philosophy,
Or "Wisdoms of the Ages" *only* wise—
Might still have chattered on among the boughs,
Among the roots of the dark-dreaming seas
Have slept impalpable. . . . Nay, this your breast,
Which has too much a stranger been to mine!
Has it not evidence of sex as old,
Older, and of some other than your own?
Has *She* not seen examples long enough
Wrought of her sons for wisdom, good my lord?
Oh no! you do us women wrong, who strive
To make ourselves a meaning otherwhere. . . .
Man's soul is all that makes him more than brute.
His mind? I think some higher anthropoid
Might do as well with training. . . . O you men!
You have been loud with panders' praise of gold

To make us women harlots in our hearts,
Till, sexless gibes, we mock Maternity!
To make us hypocrites, cheats, liars all!
You sneer at Greed and crown him overlord,
And wonder why is woman prostitute!
You have acclaimed the liar and the thief,
And wonder men are liars, that they steal!
Have made the business of a world your boast
To prove an honest man beneath a rogue,
And so pervert all to dishonesty.
I think you lords our masters none too wise!
We do but strive to crown Love over lusts,
And help us all to larger life than slaves'.
How shall the soul grow but with liberty—
And liberty to strive for higher things?
Methinks a little learning safe in this—
That Love alone can be the ultimate
And supreme ethic for a world of men,
Unless souls are but mere monstrosities. . . .
And I. . . . I loved you, O my lord to be!
And you spoke pretty things, and for me fetched
And carried. And you spoke with dignity. . . .
I dared not tell you of my love. Oh no!
Your dignity had made *my* music mute.

THE MAN

Then blame you but Convention! Blame not me,
Or blame me henceforth with injustice!

THE WOMAN

A—h!
My dear! My dear! I. . . .

THE MAN

Hush, my love, be still!
The moon is dark and all the world is still.
To-night is very wonderful.

THE WOMAN

Oh! O-h!
O-h!

THE MAN

Now shall *you* speak all your heart's desire
And tell me all the meanings of your love!

THE WOMAN

I loved you from the first. . . . It was to me
Fair as the morning, but a misty thing

As mornings sometimes are. . . . And then you went,
And it was as a dawn defeated, grey,
A dawn that had but borrowed from the dark
A little lapse of life and sunk again.
You came once more, and with you came the sun,
And through my dreams the spring crept always then,—
There were birds singing in a place of leaves,
I think, or so it seemed to me. And then the dark:
They told me you were wild. . . . I pictured arms
About you, of some woman of the night. . . .
I think my soul was dark with many nights
In which no star came ever, only clouds
And pale loose limbs of passions bought and sold.
I was but girl, but in me was the stuff
Of poetry; and poets see these things.
I hated you; yet hating had been glad
To be your—woman. So I, hating, loved. . . .
It is the way of women, that, I think. . . .
Oh love, my love! I think I had not feared
To have gone down to shameful death for you!

Yes, kiss me now! How hot your face is. . . .
a-h! . . .
And the years passed: I grew to harder things.
Oh yes, my heart was hardened, many times. . . .
And drugged myself with Pleasure's platitudes,
Golf, bridge, or horses racing—anything. . . .
I think to live for these things is to find
Life good, as life is to a drunkard good,
Before it leaves his body but a cask. . . .
Yes, life is good to drunkards—for a span. . . .
No, now you shall not kiss me, yet awhile.
I sinned against my love. Stay! Hear it all!
I never guessed you loved me, but I sinned.
There was a man—a poet—crossed in love,
But as has been with poets, powerful
To draw some women's souls toward the stars. . . .
He took me out into a place of stars—
I told him that I loved, and was not loved,
And bade him kiss me there, as man might kiss
The woman that he loved. . . . I had a will
To feel myself within his arms, and feel
You in his kiss catch fire upon my soul. . . .
He kissed me so I could have gone away

With him, for very weariness of love. . . .
For longing, though it were by deputy,
To ease the pent up pain of womanhood.
I sinned with him, in spirit, many times,
Against my love for you. . . . But that one time
Is all man's arms have held me, save your own.
I think you may forgive me, good my lord?

THE MAN

My dear, of course I do, but. . . .

THE WOMAN

Afterwards. . . .
At Ascot. . . . you remember. . . . Mother said,
Men must have women. . . . Oh, I hated her—
That woman near the coaches! For I saw
How you talked there together. And I went—
When you had gone—and questioned her. But what
I did, or said, I scarcely know. For you
Had grown more *nearer* to me than before.
I spoke to her, I know, and that her face
Broke out upon my words like shouted shame. . . .

And when I saw she pitied with her eyes,
My pride had made me easy murderess,
But that she laughed—as women laugh in hell. . . .
I sometimes think hell lives in laughter. . . .
Then
I pitied her; and once again she laughed—
In other wise—and singing went away. . . .
Until I die I shall remember her.

THE MAN

My dear, I. . . .

THE WOMAN

No! I would not have the blight
Of the world's poison-growth, Hypocrisy,
Find ever entrance in our love's red rose! . . .
The moon has power to ripen growing corn. . . .
This night of stars has ripened love for us
And bade his every petal feel their fire.

THE MAN

Forgive me, and forget. . . .

THE WOMAN

I would forgive,
Were you the murderer of my own soul.
Forget, I cannot. That is woman's way. . . .
I think it is the only way we have. . . .
And yet, I think, were you as some men are,
A trader on our strength and weakness, love,
Whereby your selfish sins forgiveness found—
Your pleasure's debts all cancelled by my pain,
Your honour and my own in pawn to lust,—
I had as lief you killed me as my soul!

THE MAN

Shame holds my tongue, so that I. . . .

THE WOMAN

Kiss me, then!
You will be true to me? Ah yes, I know—
I *feel* that I shall hold you spite of all:
Though men, they say, are not as women are,—
That sudden gusts beat down their constancy. . . .
I think were I grown sudden bestial
You still would find me faithful, good my lord!

THE MAN

My love! My sweet! My wife that will be soon!
I know not how to tell you all. . . .

THE WOMAN

Kiss me!
And *I will* tell you all. How as a vane,—
When the wind dies at sundown in the west
That was the east wind of a summer dawn,—
Swings east again at evening, so my dreams
Set nightwards ever now,—against the time
When in some secret hush of ecstasy
My maidenhood may secret yield her up
Such blowth as love has brought to full, for love
To glory but the more in gathering;
Or from her maiden musings wake a bride;
Or dream in lands of sleep whose boundaries
Know strong invasion of a husband's arms.
Oh love! My love! I know not how to tell. . . .

THE MAN

Kiss me!

THE WOMAN

The sweetness of the passioned pain
That sometimes strikes my spirit: nor the fear
That death or dreadful happening may come
Between us, and turn life and dreams to dust
And God to mockery. . . . For many times,
Even as now—when under quiet stars—
I have felt tiny hands about my breasts,
As light, as soft, as star-fire on my eyes
Drawing my heart to Godward. Oh my love!
I know not if it be a shameless thing
My lips would utter for. . . .

THE MAN

I know there is—
There is a—something holy in your face!

THE WOMAN

But. . . . Oh, I cannot say it!

THE MAN

Listen! S—sh!

Her mother made the match. Though old Sir George

Was easy fish to hook. My husband helped.
He thought it was worth risking something on—
A good investment for us. Then the fool
Must needs go fall in—love, they call it! Love!
And bolted with some artist-idiot
Or poet-lunatic! I was so mad
I could have prayed she'd starve—the thankless fool!
How dreadfully annoying for you both!

Annoying!

THE WOMAN

Oh the. . . .

THE MAN

S-sh! My sweetheart! Hush!
They're gone. Forget them. Teach me of your love!
I am the puppet of my own philosophy
And am grown full of wisdom like a fool.
I doubt if men but *guess* at purity,
Where women *know*. Their chastity is such
As keeps from sin for shame and not for joy—
A penitence, not passion.

THE WOMAN

Some women!

THE MAN

I think that was a very woman spoke?

THE WOMAN

Y-e-s, I suppose it was. . . . I will forget
That ever were as those two in the world.
I will forget all things that keep us wise,
As the world teaches wisdom. Good my lord,
I think we will not play at cards to-night?

APHRODITE AT LEATHERHEAD

Four streams: whose whole delight in island
lawns,
Dark-hanging alder dusks and willows pale
O'er shining grey-green shadowed waterways,
Makes murmuring haste of exit from the vale—
Through fourteen arches voluble
Where river tide-weed sways;
Whose burthen is of things insoluble
From hidden deeps below the hills where yawns
Some veinous and insatiable Desire,
That sits for ever there
When Summer fills the valley with slow fire,
Whereto the stealthy Mole is minister
In secret places damp and caverns dire.

Red brick-work lichened grey; grey stone to
green:
Mossed corner-crannies flowerful with flame:
And red roofs hiding daily deeper now,

As Spring comes quietly the hills between—
With deeper breath misting the elms below.
And the old walls—but yellow ere she came—
Are gladly golden as they take the sun;
And brightly bronze about them poplars grow. . . .
All things in shine and shadow seem to know
That spring is everywhere and benison.
Clear to their pebbled floors the waters move
To mix their several courses in one tide. . . .
And there I saw Spring floating, like a bride
Veiled in the weft of her own dreams: and Love
Laughed in the spray he shook from off his vans;
And through bright water-drops his countenance
Was roguish as a young god's face above
The amorous ways of some white nymph, grown coy
Of love for long, till conquered by the boy
Among her secret rushes. I descried
These things, and others, on the southern side.

Yea, all was sweetly, of a sudden, strange.
Were no more houses, but great woods that passed
Into the shadows of some mountain range

Crowned with a sunlight coronet of snows.
Now shining flowers, by verdant glooms o'ercast,
Along a bank beside blue water rose.
Blue water broken by low waterfalls
And plashy places, strewn with rocks and sand,
As Naiads would delight. There one did stand
In a broad sunlight; like some statue planned
Of Love himself, whose marble meaning calls
Out of the ages:—more a vital thing
Than many a heart of beats grown dead to spring,
Whose body is a sepulchre that palls,
With its own pallid plinth, all burgeoning
Of primal joys at Love's chief festivals.
All loveliness to make one greatly mad
With dreams whereof men grow more madly great
Upon that glory which, of starry date,
Crowns Beauty's co-eternal high estate;
All these good things she had.
There was a sweet, pure passion in her eyes
To make all cynic sense grow gladly wise—
E'en sorrow, wisely glad.

All things, it seemed, to her were ministers:
Thrushes, flute-throated, shook the shades with song,
In amorous, rich, and lovely echoes long.
So, nightingales in sunlight would rehearse
Their moontide music: and a fairy throng
Of blue-winged butterflies would oft repair
To visit the broad blossom of her hair,
That, like some golden-hanging creeper, clung
Round the wild rose-buds of her bosom there.
All things that deem it more to live and die,
And to bring forth and blossom, than to lose
The fear of death by being never born,
Did pilgrimage about her feet—to vie
In plenitude of thanks. And each in turn,
Among a many there, had power to choose
That gift she deemed most gracious. Thus cuckoos
Made woodland evening mellow with their cry,
But sometimes sang all night, till they should learn
The ordered harmony of night and morn
That pleased her most. And all that liberty
Which is Love's servant and his great reward—
Whose virtue bids growth grow, and melody

Be made of bird, and leaves' delightful tune,
And the green grateful guerdon of the sward
Be gladder, being free;
And all the phased enchantment of the moon,
And every change of sun or starry light,
That made her woodland places wonderful
With cloud and beams and shadows dark or bright—
All these did praise her of their own accord,
Whilst all around was heard,
On loom-gales tender over day and night,
The mystery of Love's most lovely word,
Spring's foam-flung "APHRODITE."
All white she was, but as the foam of May
Is white on apple-orchards under stars.
Her like I have not seen by mortal day,
By many a night, when dreams were avatars
Of Love's delight, I have not seen it. Nay!
Not since youth died, and love has passed away. . . .
It may be few are tempted so as are
Poets; for whom is woman's loveliness
Made lovelier than morning may express
With all those hues whereof her melting star
Is tender witness. Through the evening woods

Song floating on the sunset's ardent floods
Is very lovely: and there is a noon,
So tense with Summer's passionate distress
Of extreme silent Beauty's breathlessness
That all things seem to swoon
Down the large luxury of languor's dreams—
So prodigal it teems
With passion's trance, mid-rapture craves for boon.
All greatly good are these: their several praise
Make up the total of the poet's ways
That lead his soul to God that is in art.
But surer lies there even,
Of all his roads to heaven:—
High dreams, wherein a woman plays her part;
Where, mingled in some supreme period,
Their blood accelerates the heart of God.

Who has loved greatly has more greatly lived
Than those for whom is life a market-place.
Not for his breadth of Being were contrived
Of man the scales, or measure of his grace.
But he has made his bargain face to face
With God—if there be God in more than lies

Of ancient vogue, that in the Truth's disguise
Were hawked by priests as unction for sore eyes,
Till all the world was blinded, and fell down
Before such gods beside whom wood and stone
Were truths of wholesome aspect. At the throne
Of her, God's goddess of the year's great Truth
That is in Spring and primal Nature's passion,
I did fall down in fancy of such fashion
That all my soul, and body too, forsooth!
Cried out in worship holy. Like a youth,
When Longing's ecstasies would fan the fires
Of love's delirium to strange desires
That hang 'twixt earth and heaven, was I then!
Forgotten, all, were baser things of men:
All baseness known of women I forgot.
And all the morning of pure passion's pain
Rang rapturous responses through my brain—
Love's own dear antidote.

Then spake I to this lady in such wise:—
"O Incarnation lovely of my Love,
O lovely lust of Increase called of Spring,
O Bride of Burgeoning,
I am become all bridegroom for thine eyes!
In every sense of me thine echoes teem:

By this broad mirror of the noon above
The stars still set and rise
To watch thee from the darkness of their dream!
Their passion I can trace
Reflected in thy face!
For thee, with voice of worship, calls the stream;
The slow clouds rise from holy mountain tops
Like incense for thee blown in silver steam;
And the pure fountain drops
Her singing shade of rainbows through the beam!
All things are quick to love, this April day.
There is a world of longing in the wind
About thy tresses twined:
It listeth, or it lusteth—Who shall say?

"O Goddess of the glory in green leaves,
I am heart-hungry, I, thy worshipper!
And fasting sense within my soul perceives,
Thou lovely whisperer,
That famished I may feed my full of thee!
Let us behind the mountains and the sea
To some far land where sorrow never dwells,
Nor ever evil comes;
Where often I have tracked thee through the
dells,

And thy soft south wind roams
Laden with fragrant breathing of bluebells!
There may I mix myself with bounteous thine:
In all my various need and veins I pine:
Let me be made one with thee, and divine!

"God gave His sanction, surely, when He gave
A soul to man and beauty to the world,
To claim the light within a falling wave,
The moonrise and the daydawn dew-empearled,
And every dædal impulse of the sun,
For Joy's own bride, Imagination.
To fill with increase earthly truth, and save,
With gracious things, the soul this side the grave. . . .
And thou, O lovely One, art all of Truth!
Thou art Truth's greatest goddess, that I know:
Long have I loved thee, from my youngest youth
Upwards. Oh, hear me, Goddess; let us go!
And, as we go, forgive that I have sinned
In loving thee too little anywhere!
I hear a voice of whispers on the wind:
'Fair as she is, she yet would be more fair,
And yet more dear, for thee to clasp her there,
Than thou hast ever known!'

Surely the fountain's shade is in thy hair,
Clear-falling, full of music of low tone.
And trees are surely making lovely moan
To swell my longing's prayer:—
Alone!—the fountain; and the trees—alone!
Oh, hearken! Oh, mine only goddess, hark!
Immortal ocean mads me—yon great pine
Voices that sea whereon we will embark
For lands of love, where lesser suns grow dark
Behind us, and before us, greater shine
On thine own island always! where the lark
Sings without ceasing, and his cloud of song
Is all of cloud 'twixt us and deep blue heaven!—
Lest thou shouldst slay me of this madness stark,
Lest I, perchance, of love should do thee wrong. . . .
I could do ravishment upon thee, even!

"Oh, no! I meant it not, my Aphrodite!
Be not in haste to anger thee for such!
If I did haste to lead me to delight,
Blame me not now for loving thee too much!
See, with a song I'll charm thee till art kind;
Till all things matter nothing, only love!

I'll woo thee till art won for very shame
Thou didst keep Love long waiting but to prove
The patience, not the passion, of his kind—
The wisdom, not the wonder, of his name!"

"Where thy green bowers are, by the white foam,
Oh, Aphrodité, be mine!
O'er waves of that song the sea sings in the pine
I am fain to pursue thee, to follow thee home,
To Desire's own echoing shrine!
Dark the stars are above us: wait not for the night.
Oh, haste! Let us love by thine own April light,
To those dream-island murmurs of thine,
Aphrodite!
Aphrodité! Spring's lady! Be mine!"

Then did my lady from her gracious eyes
Make only answer for a little space;
But dreams as old as any paradise
Were passing o'er the Eden of her face.
She made as if to speak me answer thrice;
And twice there came a whisper full of "Nays!"
And once there came a whisper full of sighs—
She was a very woman in her ways!

Whoso has heard the birch-wood's voice of praise
In all her leafy languages arise,
When warm winds mould her myriad hair of green,
With sunlight soft between,
And tenderness and tuneful artifice,
Has heard an echo, but he has not *seen*
How breathed my lady's bosom then, I ween!
For—shaking out her shining hair—thuswise
She sang; and for the manner how she sang,
I think the wind sang like it to the sea
A million years ago,
Or by some Cytherean promontory
That morning when from ocean's cave she sprang,
With warm hair wet and heavy, hanging low,
All foam and mystery.

"I am more fair, and haply far more human,
Than mortal maids ungracious in their love?
O Love of Mine, that wouldst so have me woman,
The sun sees, all the sky looks down above! . . .
My bosom for a great delight of kisses
Grows tender, as to woo me to thy mind.

I am grown fain to hide me in my tresses. . . .
Nay, then! shall Aphrodité prove unkind?
And am I fair, and am I dear to thee?
O Love, O Love! that thou so temptest me!"

And I went to her: we were all alone!
And very real and near my lady smiled.
And very far away had all things gone
With Love's own lonely landscapes reconciled
But hardly. Now a shade of April trees
Made murmur through the kisses of the sun
About our coming, and a choir of birds
Sang all at once old Hymen's morning hymn. . . .
I did not see there any Cherubim
Or flaming swords, or flaming fiddlesticks,
To frighten folk away with fire-work tricks.
And all the snakes were silent that were there
Save those soft golden ones—my lady's hair,
Through which she oft would whisper golden words
So all her hair grew eloquent, and dim
With golden shadow all her countenance.
I thought the blue love-lightnings of her glance
Had waked men made of Arctic-midnight cold,

Had made more timid love be overbold:
For me, I walked in trance,
Too tender to be fearful, organ-souled,
From which she shook the utmost chords of sense,
That trembled round her wild white innocence
Like choral dawns round life's high places rolled.

We two alone through all an April shade!
Great hollies flickered argent fire and gloomed
Like dark blue midnight memories that loomed
Still permeate with brooding sense of stars.
And with a sense of day's own dye there bloomed
Long spaces steeped in bluebells' azure light,
Till earth rose heaven. Soft winds disarrayed
The birch with splendour so her myriad hairs
Were as green water-fountains falling bright
About shy limbs of their own silver sprite.
And from her greenwood lairs
Through many a silent breathing of blown trees
Did Echo steal on Echo unawares,
And shadow-haunted glade
Across a world of woodland: then the breeze
Burdened with brine and long-drawn cadences,
Deep, solemn-sounding only as the sea's!

Now flashed the foam-white crescent wave and curled
The long blue shine of waters crowding home
With all the plangent pulse of ocean's world,
Eager to fill each separate mouth of foam
With sigh of breathing kisses salt and slow,
And print its passioned progress o'er the strand:
The sun was scarce more golden than the sand
Among the dunes of grassy beaches low.
And from the sea-wind's wide-flung first embrace
That shook the birches' hair with amorous storms
Such sweet, strong madness shuddered through the place
We two were nigh to panic, in alarms
That only lovers feel when face to face
And joys to warmer grow.
I durst not ask surrender of those charms
She was become as eager to forgo
As I to lose my way amid her arms,
As she to lose her woman's way of "No!"
Her sense and mine swayed, trembled, danced, and flung
Madly against each other. The blue sky
Darkened against a darker sea. We clung—
We two together—for a space, to sigh

And pant with longings inarticulate
In any language save of starry date
That Love interprets through tumultuous tears
His own warm wishes dye,
For everlasting meaning to the years;
God's breath of Lust, love's lips would sanctify.

In every vein some ancestor of old
Who clasped his bride in caverns oversea
Spake to me then; and Passion's pæan rolled
Mute from the margins of eternity
With its own might of message. "Comfort me!
O Love of Mine, you loved me long ago:
Because thou *art,* thou *wast*—in Arcady!—
Before Love's lure was laid in Ilion!—
Before Astarte or Semiramis,
Thou sawest in far forgotten years agone
How the moon held her midnight mysteries
In the untrodden places of the snow
On highest Himalaya!—We were one
In sun-warm sands that waited Babylon,
O Love of Mine that loved me long ago!
We two may meet and mix but once, no more,
In each of all our myriad lives, and oh!
A myriad streams of mingling through me flow

To mate with thine, beloved, by the shore!"
She spake it; and I knew her mine to love
In her most intimate and tender trance,
In rapture where the inner circumstance
Of Being breaks in primal blowth above
The bridal-beds of elementary pain.
I watched her pure eyes clouding with the stain
Of passion-surges grown intolerable
Against the flood-gates of her maidenhood:
And in her face a lovely shameful mood
Stained, with its blushing darkness of eclipse,
Her white skin scarlet as her anxious lips
That whispered: "Love me when the tide is full!"
She had slipped down and left me so I stood
As one from dreams, when sudden waking strips,
From out the closure of his arms, delight
In some dear woman, captive all the night,
Whose tender ministrations memories mock
Through empty, hateful portals at his blood.
She had slipped down beneath me so I stood
Shaken, in that green shadow of the wood;
Swaying, and staring at the stricken trees
Writhing among embraces of the breeze,
I saw their white limbs rock:

Without, I heard the echoes of the tide. . . .
And now she made a place for me beside
Her lithe limbs laid among deep grass and good
For lovely strife at amorous victories:
She hid her face within its golden hood
Of ardent hair, her only veil,—my bride!
And as I kissed her through it, "At the flood. . . .
At the full flood-tide take me!" then she gasped.
And so we waited, mutely mad through all
Anticipation's raptured interval,
Limbs interwoven, beating bosoms clasped.

* * * * * * *

The tide had turned an hour: the outer deep
Echoed with fainter music in our ears,
Breathed in our blood soft, tuneful things of sleep:
And soft, pleached sunlights dried her passion's tears.
I watched a thousand recollections creep
In faint, quick flushes from her bosom's nest
To hide among her golden shade of hair. . . .
My lovely Aphrodité! Oh, to rest
All weariness of sordid struggle there,
But once again! To me thou wast more fair,

And art, than aught; and full of God's own love
And all the wonder of His wedded years!
I kissed His hand when I have kissed thy breast,
Surely, if there be God found anywhere!
My Aphrodité! Only once again! . . .
The memory of our mingling soars above,
Star-like, among the spheres.
Fraught with new meaning is the stellar Wain:
God's lovely lust is wound about the stars,
And every earthly atom woos its kind!
All pregnant Nature teemed that avatars
Be born in Man, to breed from every wind
Response of holy Truth, so that the mind
Of all men hear His message in their youth;
And hearing, know, as know they surely can,
That naught which man may ever do for Truth
Compares with all that Truth shall do for man!
Truth only may teach Beauty, Beauty this:—
That Love alone is worthy lord of souls;
Hate, but a hireling still the beast controls—
Ugly, a mean thing, full of blemishes,
That yet shall rise, as man rose from the beast,
Through many purifyings, till its yeast
Be potent as a purer Manhood's barm
For use on evil only, and all harm

Has lost its power to choke the centuries.
Yea! in that tranquil hemisphere of time
Men call the future hate shall cleanse the earth
With manifold Truth's teaching, for sublime
Example even unto love that worth
Is in all things that best fulfil their birth.
Yea! as the Yeast of God, in man shall rise
The sun of Truth, till evil come to dearth
Among the outer darkness, and fulfil
Its life in one great catacomb of Ill. . . .
As I dreamed thus beside her, here her eyes,
That had been veiled awhile with drowsy peace,
Opened: it seemed she knew my thoughts. "To these,
O Love of Mine, shalt add this other thing:—
Lust *was,* that Love *might be.* They blaspheme God
Who criticise His methods. Lust is good,
And he who mocks it doth imbue his blood
With mockery against God's grace of Spring.
Lust is His breath who quickened all a world—
Too good a thing to waste on baser joy:
Whoso shall lose his lust in loveless ease
Shall find his pleasure only to destroy.
This shall be truth for lovers:—Only love

Than lust in them should holier be: above
All other ways shall this one purify!"
She paused in thought. Then both her white
arms curled
Softly about my neck. She whispered: "Dear,
Remember this hereafter; I am near,
Yea, very near thee always; and would guide
My poet's passions only to her side
Thou mayest love, and loving her, love me."
She spake the last a trifle wistfully.
"And I will so awake, I promise thee,
Her woman's nature, thou needst never roam
To clasp me ever by this island foam. . . .
My memory shall move you in your home."

At that I made to answer; but she stopped
My mouth with many kisses for a space.
I kissed her tender eyelids when they dropped,
That could not hide the longing in her face.
But afterwards, again I answered her,
"My goddess, though were every woman fair,
That would not make her love me—make her
love:
I doubt some women know what love may be!"
Her eyes were laughing as she answered me.

"No? Can all *men* love? Art a foolish one!
There are some things e'en poets' brains above.
I say we women are so great at it,
So old we are in passion's lovely lore,
Not all men-poets that the sun shone on
Have guessed how deep Desire in us can sit
And sing such songs as Sappho sang of yore—
Nay, sings in us for ever! There is more
Of God's own meaning than a man may guess
In woman that is Woman!" . . . Strange distress
Shook out in tremors through her frame: she wept
Such poignant tears as only women keep.
And long it took to kiss them into sleep:
The tide was out ere she had ceased to weep. . . .
Only the wind sighed. . . . In her arms I slept.

* * * * * * *

Evening. . . . The further sky had faded light:
It gave the sharp sea-line a deeper hue
Than ere I slept: somewhat more darkly bright
The sea seemed,—one unbroken, lovely blue
Save for its host of small waves falling white,
As the slow tide made over emerald rocks
And broad brown levels of the chevroned sand

That gleamed to gold in places. Aphrodite
Sat by me, holding mine with one small hand
The while the other spread out wayward locks
For Fancy's idle weaving so I saw
Her blue-blown bosom's founts that glimmered through
Had fed too long the sea-wind's chilly maw.
And at the sight my passion sprang anew
To robe her round in warm protection's clasp.
But she brake from me with a sudden gasp—
"O Love of Mine, the hour is come! Adieu!
Adieu? Oh, ay! *Farewell!* . . . yet not farewell. . . .
No more may Aphrodité be such bride
To thee as she. . . . Alas! Alas!" she cried.
I seized her then, her resolution tried
So sorely, that she, moaning, made to tell
I should once more take all my last long fill
Of her; but, soon as I had had my will,
She must be gone for ever from my side—
In mortal shape, that is. . . . And here the tide,
Meseemed, spake sudden from a falling wave
Of deeper tone than heretofore. She gave
A nod of piteous gesture to the sea:

Her smooth throat shuddered as she echoed, "Hark!"
And in her eyes a birth of tears grew dark:
And then she gave her lovely self to me.

But of some things we spake. . . . I shall not tell
Of that last anguish of our mingled lives,
That like some unforgetful fever drives
Along my blood this moment. How she made,
As the stars strengthen, so desire in me
More manifest with lovely light and shade.
This may I:—At the last we kissed farewell,
There by the shore of that dark evening sea,
That ne'er may fade from out my memory
Till life's last pulse has faded in a knell. . . .
Yea, we stood up together at the last:
She had looked seaward thrice: her blown hair fell
In whispering, wild sadness—"It is past!"—
About my breast. . . . The tide was calling home
My lovely one. She shivered in a blast
That sounded like a summons from the foam
She might not disobey. . . . And then I heard
Far out upon the sea-line, near the sun,
A murmur of waves falling grow to one

Clear word, that shone like sea-birds, seen afar,
Shine when they leave the water suddenly;
And silent as the foam fades, or a star
Among wide waste sea-waters was that word
The sea-line spake to me.
And, as it came, the trees around were stirred
Strangely, as of some Sorrow passing through;
And the wind rose three sudden times and shrilled,
And at the sound the shadow of the sea
Passed over eyes that had been heaven's hue;
And thrice her hair was shaken as it filled,
With sharp, small sounds she stifled ere they grew
Larger and tore my ears, while passion thrilled
Her tightened arms. And then our lips withdrew
That had shut hard in stricken hold on each:
And blind with parting's pain
I stood where we had lain;
And from our bridal-bed had last of speech
With her, my bride. For now she turned again—
The tide was round her little feet—and called;
And all the sea in echo rose and fell:

"Farewell, O Love! O Mortal Love, farewell!
We have not loved in vain!
Already in me quickens graft of thee!
And all my womb, with mortal love enthralled,
Shall burgeon with fresh fruit of Poetry!
That poetry which makes men to me turn,
Even as thou didst mix with me, to make
My love a meaning so their senses ache
With purer passion when their lust shall burn:—
Seeing that loveless lust begets a rod,
Whereby the soul is beaten from the brute,
And the blind brute knows but the beast for God;
Till God's own voice be mute,
Where blasphemy for ugliness doth yearn.
And now I go! Take comfort! I am near
When thou shalt clasp some tender woman kind,
Surely, I promise thee, shall be more dear
Her kisses, for my teaching!" And the wind
Spake of a sudden, solemn; and the trees
Shook, all together; and a shape of foam
Clung wildly white upon her, round her knees:
Her hair, her hand, waved; and she turned her home.

Then from the bower of birch-trees, that had hung
With tender tapestries our joys, and sung
Our bridal benison, I brake and cried,
As one from whom love's last despair has wrung
Hatred of future living. In the tide,
As men may fling life from them, then I flung,
And sought my death in tombs that held my bride.
But with soft strength resistless I was borne,
Three separate times of struggle, back to land—
She would not let me drown. So life forlorn
Went up with baffled death once more to stand
'Midst those green imprints of impassioned hours,
Where fragrant from her body lay the grass,
And the mute stems of broken bluebell-flowers
Bore bridal-witness. Thence I saw her pass
Toward the falling darkness far away,—
Her gold hair like a floating flame. Alas!
The lovely golden head that might not stay.
Swift sank the sun from out our wedding-day,
And sorrowful for me that sundown showed
The while I watched her, passing, float afar.

Till, in her place, there loomed a sudden star
And through a mist of purple twilight glowed
Insistent, white, and wonderful. And soon,
As one that sees a darkness on the moon,
Infected with an earthlight, shape and shine—
Upon the shadow of the further coast
I saw, above the wan foam-water's line,
A glooming shape that floated on the dark
Of April's ebbing flood, against a ghost—
Like a faint flame that silver limbs display—
And glimmered lonely o'er the wave: a stark,
Still shape that gloomed beside a silver ray—
The crescent of a month that might be May.

And, as befoundered by some larger sense,
By passion brought to birth for vain delight—
Whose wings, alas, are less than infinite,
Nay, weak as wide and wild with the Immense—
My soul beat blindly down that bridal-night
Whose joy was flown before its screen of stars
Had dropped a veil of splendours dark and bright
On love's own splendid shame. As iron bars
The darks that shut upon me seemed, and rang
As iron rings reverberant when my soul,

Too feeble for the quest on which it sprang,
Shuddered upon them; till such strong control
As Frenzy has for madmen rioted
Its own despair to ruin that was ease,
And the mad stars, distraught as mine own head,
Grew quiet with their old accustomed peace.
Then like a man from such a grave arisen
As holds the springtide-splendours of a dream,
'Gainst which is life a thing grown pale in prison,
My soul went sadly forward down a stream
Of half-remembered twilight things that draw
The patient pulses from their sleepy blood
Back into power of living. Soon I saw
The darkness break and scatter from a wood,
Familiar with a host of laughing leaves
In England's loveliest late April mood,
That drew my feet by threads of grassy track
Adown green slopes and sunlight. Sense conceives
No light so swift as then came rolling back
The town above, the bridge whereon I stood.

* * * * * * *

Then I awoke, and watched a little space
The four small streams grow into one; and heard

A train behind me whistle. But the place
Was strange for Surrey still. And afterward,
Her name clung to my ears, her glory glowed,
At every bend along the London road.

HIS ANSWER TO THOSE WHO IMPUTED IMPURITY TO HIM, IN REGARD TO THE PRECEDING POEM.

I sing that BEAUTY which is born of God,
Or gods be things as grocers use to gull
Mankind with the belief their goods are full
Of virtues that may never cross the road.
I sing DESIRE DEGRADED is a thing
Such as might bring a very god to tears:
That love is lovelier for its lust; as Spring
Exalts, not makes a harlot of, the years.

For Lust that is The Dog with Bad Name given
Sends all the stars in protest over heaven.
And who requites the Spirit of his Birth
With ignominy—sends that spirit forth
To shameful death, not joyous peace and strife,
To help make harlots while he robs his wife.

THE THORN BRAKE: A TRAGEDY

A tale of sisters, twins, and of their love
That with the vestal fires of maidenhood
Shone through all seasons of their younger youth
As twin stars burn in calm communion.
And as twin stars, dusked by the smallest cloud,
So sorrow, touching one, had darkened both,
Nor gladness moved, nor wonder woke them so
But that each felt the other's in her own:
To fret in separation, or to joy
In unison when separation o'er,—
Their several natures had a common aim,
To share their pleasures was their greatest good:
In grief their solace was to mix their tears.
A mother's life was forfeit at their birth:
At harvest, in their thirteenth summer, Death
Came gleaning through the August evening fields
And called the farmer, there among his men:
A red moon rising saw them fatherless.

The farm was sold, save only that they kept
A cottage for their own, with garden ground
Set thick with flowers and hoary apple trees
Below a wooded shoulder of the hills.
Here change came seldom with the changing years:—
A lonely valley, with the western end
Closed with a ridge of pines that darkling reared
Its crest and made a shadow night and day,
Or smoked against the twilight when the dusk
Went with damp breath and chill among the trees—
Seen from the cottage.
In the summer time
The place was full of quiet such as dwells
In low lands where the meadow waters move
Slowly and silently by narrow ways
'Mid the long fragrance of the meadowsweet.
Here time laid balm upon the wounds of death;
And love sufficed them, where the means to life
Of country pleasures, health, and quiet days
Within their cottage home were amply theirs.
They knew contentment, seeking not to know
A fuller life where life was full to them,—
The country's face, with features like a friend

Passed in their journeys through the years of life
By woods and hills and little market town,—
Where wildflowers grew, and where the streams
came down,
Like voices heard in echo, from the hills
To lose at once their language and their breath
Within a mere, where moorhens made their
home
And no man went—a marshy loneliness
Of water darkling in the dusk of reeds.
A place where sound came seldom, save in sighs;
Whose lightest laughter seemed the marigolds';
And, for the younger of the twain, possessed
With spirits sombre—for the elder, sad,
Who went there oft. To them were known the
birds
That filled with song the silent breast of dawn
And with thanksgiving filled all waking hours
When the young year came softly through the
land.
The stars they knew that climbed the solemn
east
When night obscured with sleep the orient hills:
And they would wander hand in hand at dusk
Upon the down behind them, wondering

To see the death-fires of the passing day
Burn to their ashes, till the purple west
Seemed only one great silence and a star.
Then would their handclasp tighten as they went,
Lest, in the season of her singing time,
The nightingale should wake the wood with pain
Each felt was in the song and knew not why,
Save that the lark's was gladness unto hers.
Thus homeward wending, they would wait for sleep,
And dream together by each other's side;
So, the old dame who dwelt alone with them
Would set their meals, and so their ingle stools
When winter's night ran roaring through the hills
That girt the place with strength and solitude.
Alike in these things were they as the west
Is like the east at noonday when the sun
Sees not a cloud within the ambitus
Of wide horizons to depose his reign;
Not more unlike the sunset's burning breast
The cool of eastern evening—otherwise:
Love made them one, and Nature different.

Beneath their hands the cottage garden grew
Into such loveliness as love begets
In old-world places, when to Nature given.
The jessamine, the clematis, the yellow rose,
Clung fondlier to the lichen on the walls:
The arch of hazel boughs above the gate,
Each year with fuller tribute welcoming,
Became a bower where roses' fragrant breath
Vied with the honeysuckle's eloquence
Inviting love to enter. And beyond
Were high delights of blue delphiniums:
Great bell-flowers, and larkspurs, marigolds,
Sweet Williams variant, forget-me-nots,
Grew thickly there: and came there from the field
Germander speedwells, grey as kittens' eyes,
That love to look from hedgerows at the sun,
With all their blue-eyed sisters; campions;
Stitchworts: and from the wild the rose-bay came
And made one damp green corner bright with bloom.

Behind a dusk of sweetbriar 'gainst the road
The sisters would enjoy with simple pride

The comments of such folk as passed; and there
Would sit and sew, and talk of many things,
And hazard guesses only half in jest
At footsteps waiting softly by the gate
O' nights, that love's low music filled and stars.
And each would laugh and fall to wondering,
And laugh again, and doubt that Love would come,
And if he came, be welcome.

So five years
They grew together, though between them change
Had passed and left one other than before:
And she, mistrustful of herself, spoke not,
But her first secret from her sister kept—
Knowing the other all in ignorance.
Nell, by an hour the elder, long had reached
The plangent press of waters where the stream
First feels the trouble of the outer sea
And innocence is lost in womanhood,
Ere yet the current of her sister's life,
Through laughing shallows full of little song,
Had danced its merry way to deeper things.
Rose they had named her, and had named her well:

A white rose touched with red along the lips,
And in her cheeks the roses waxed and waned
Through the swift seasons of her many moods.
Her hair was like the Autumn's, full of gold:
Her eyes were virginal as early skies
Seen through calm dusks at daybreak: and her voice
Had in its echoes something of the stream's,
When through low arches of a greenwood way
A brook's small comment is a grateful thing.
All grace was in her such as joys the sense,
And in her every movement gladness woke.
Her tenderness was more than April days.
Darker, her sister Nell, with hazel eyes;
Deep-bosomed for her years, and larger limbed:
Her hair's black coil from sunlight borrowed bloom,
As clouds do when with sunset darkly dyed.
Her sister's gladness touched her as a child's,
And oft would make her fearful lest befall
Some unknown happening, and such a joy,
Dimmed once of storms that shake the deeps of sex,
Lose light in fading so it shone no more.
For to her sister, Nell was mother too,

And with a mother's eyes the future feared,—
Vague dreads born of her own awakenings.
At times, to some responsive chord unheard
Of any save the soul to which attuned,
The girl in sunset places would grow sad
The while the world grew old and sorrowful
As Rose had never seen it,—with regret
Immitigable, vast, of primal things.

It chanced one sabbath they had gone to hear
A preacher, whose renown preceded him
Across the hills through all that country side:
A wild man drunk with his own eloquence;
Whose honesty of faith had robbed his sense;
Till, flushed with songs of victory, his pride
At being in the confidence of God
Could scarce restrain his deep humility.
Who promised much for those who would receive
The message running riot through his soul,
(For those who would not was much dreadfulness)
Of how God had revealed himself by Faith
And spoken words of wonder that were Truth,—

Of how Truth dwelt within his God's own
Word,—
How truth which proved itself was but of man,
Though by it learned men might weigh a star.
The test applied of Faith proved greater things.
Facts by that touchstone less than fiction were:
A rib became a woman: suns stood still
Upon the city Gibeon, the moon
Within the valley Ajalon; and while
The Amorites were slaughtered righteously,
Few among all who heard him pitied them.
But moved to wonder were they as they stood
Upon that English hillside where he preached,
For even as he spoke he raised his eyes
And all his hearers followed, wondering;
Nor did the sun they looked on greatly move.
Of many things he spoke. How Jonah fared
Within the belly of a monstrous fish:
And marvelled they the more how wonderful
God was in those, the days of miracles.
(Soon after this, it was, the navvies came
From foreign parts, and at the squire's word
Enclosed another mile of common-lands.)
And God had bidden him go through the world
To preach eternal love and endless life

Of future bliss beyond the dreams of man—
His vanity well nourished by the thought
How an eternal punishment of flame
And worms that died not would avenge his creed
On those who listened and believed him not.
And many there who heard were touched to tears:
And some fell down and strewed their hair with dust,
Proud that they found them lower than the dirt,
And thought of all God's goodness unto man,—
Of how in sin they had walked heedlessly,—
How they were missing Heaven for a Hell
That made repentance easy. So they ran
About the preacher and about the place,
On all who would not hearken pressing tracts,
In which a sailor on a desert isle,
Who had cursed everything with dreadful oaths,
Found a stream running softly down its course
Full of fresh water,—how God bade him drink
(His thirst was awful) and henceforth repent.

The two girls listening to the discourse stood
Close to the preacher; and her sister's arm
Nell held the tighter when she saw her eyes

Fill with a light words had not kindled there,—
Saw how she heeded more his face and voice
Than aught his lips could conjure from his brain:
And when the man flung wide his open arms
The young girl started forward eagerly
Ere a quick shame had quenched her eyes with tears.
While through its flurry Nell had plainly seen—
As through the smoke the swans' wings threshed from foam
On Winderne Manor's long water, near by—
The virgin pinions of first passion beat
The calm of sleeping waters into storm.
He who had caused it, being quick to mark
The workings of the spirit in a crowd,
Saw her confusion; when he saw her face,
Struck on a word,—and stumbled,—found himself,—
And poured again a flood of burning words
Upon his hearers; though it seemed to Rose
His soul leapt through them seeking only hers.
His eyes she felt upon her till she burned
From head to foot so all her body blushed:
Then fear took hold on her, she knew not why,

And left her weak for shame to make complete
The havoc of her youthful senses. Nell,
Feeling her sister's shame upon her too,
Half angered at her, drew her from the crowd
And walked beside her silently: and Rose,
Who felt her silence hid but a rebuke,
Went humbly with her, mutely miserable.
Nell then at last: "How could you, Rose!" But she
Returned no answer with her lips, but glanced
With eyes that dumbly pleaded through their tears
Toward the other; and then blindly sought
Her sister's arm, and softly clung to it,
In manner beyond eloquence of words,
Craving some sympathy. They now had reached
A road, that went through woodlands past their home
And lost itself in leafage and dead years,
Where, like a league-long grave among the hills,
Its grassy silence lay alone through time;
But here, a cutting through a chalky land
Clothed with long bents, blue scabious flowers, and thick
With berried boskets of wayfaring-trees.

Stray poppies glowed in the September sun,
And autumn's quiet filled the afternoon.
Here Nell, repenting of her haste for words,
Made other reparation with her lips
Upon her sister's blushes. Whereat Rose—
And she with many roses tremulous:
"Oh Nell, I love him!" But the other felt
A sense of strangeness, wherein jealousy
Was foster-parent to a growing fear,
Come on her so that all the place was changed;
And down the road, in fancy, saw go by,
Slowly and sorrowfully, what had been
And now no longer would be—their old life,
With echoes of its passing on her ears
Sounding forebodement and a vain regret;
While yet she saw the preacher's passioned eyes
Darken within her sister's and her own;
And turned away: and all the place grew dusk
Before her soul. Then, of a sudden, Nell
Saw floating through the shade that bound her eyes
A vision of her sister long ago,
Kneeling, with down-bent golden head, upon the field

The night her father died; and when it passed
Her eyes were waiting wide with motherhood.

At nightfall there arose a glooming wind
That swept into its breast the golden spoil
Of many woodlands gathered in the dark,
And made a sound of sorrow through the vale.
Elijah Hurst—so was the preacher called—
Walked eastward in the evening; and he saw
The cottage window square with ruddy light
Marred by the night-wind's burden of blown
leaves;
Stopped at the gate, and fumbled for the latch,
Entered, and found his way, between the beds
Of wan blue flowers that usher autumn in,
Towards the porch, and knocked upon the door.
And then he saw and knew her standing there,—
A light behind her, and her figure dark
Against the light, and all the shape of her
Beheld by him and through such mystery
As shrouds while it unseals the springs of sex,
So that he stood athirst and wanted her,
Forgot his errand, seeking for her face,
Then, with an effort moved to memory,
From papers that he carried, one or two

Held out to her, and saying that he called
To leave the Word he preached. How that he fared
On foot along the valley to a town
Beyond the hills, where many dwelt in sin
And waited for his Master's call to arms
Against the hosts of Satan. There next week
He had three meetings; and returned again
To preach, next Sunday, on the same hillside
Where he, that day, had many converts made.
And (Rose it was) she answered, how she heard
His message there; then stammered;—and both knew
They would be no more strangers from that hour.
She watched him to the gate, and felt the night
Close on him like a hateful thing of hands
That held her back from happiness. Then she returned
To where her sister waited with still eyes
Fixed hard upon her sewing; so that Rose
Held out to her the papers hastily—
Finding excuse there readiest to her hand
For blushes that the fireplace mirror showed,
As with bright eyes she searched her traitor face

Aflame with banners of love's anarchy;
Then sat her down, and made pretence to read.
Nell, of a sudden, ceased her work and came
And stood beside her sister, and bent down,—
Taking her hands within her own. But Rose
With petulance of passion to be free
Of aught that might rebuke her secret dreams
Or check the woman waking in her soul,
Turned with half frightened and averted eyes;
And with the coward cruelty of fear
Found shame's relief in hurting one she loved;
Withdrew her hands and hardened all her heart;
And hated all things that might keep from her
The man she loved, or thoughts or dreams of him.
Then swift as April sunshine through wet woods
Pursues the flying rain among the trees,
Her mood had changed,—the clouds were broken up
That hung unseen but felt between them there.
And like a child she clung to Nell, and told,
With shy soft eyes, how all unmeant had been
Her sudden temper; how she not herself
Had felt, but full of strangeness,—simple words
Ending in simpler language of a kiss.

But when that midnight wrapped the valley close
In nether darkness and the wind was wild
With wail of mournful meaning in the trees,
Nell wakened from her sleep to stifled sobs,
Half heard, half felt, beside her, and lay still
With all the menace of the night without
Embodied in a sudden sense of fear
Upon her, as she listened to the child
Become a woman by the stormy breath
Of passion's advent. Then she softly spoke;
And sought amid the darkness till she found
Her sister's neck warm-throbbing to her hand
Beneath the yellow hair, and drew her close,
And kissed her sobs through silence into sleep;
Then lay and held the sleeper in her arms.
The slow night passed while thus awake she lay,
Till—when the thinning shadows round the dawn
Fled down the east wind's moaning westward path—
In the first twilight of the day she saw
Her sister's face had changed, as though the night,

Then passing, had concealed within its shade
The lapse of glad and sad, eventful years.

Behind the brow that overlooked their home
The high downs dropped to northward; pines began,
And in dark ridges rolled toward the plains.
But, ere the chalk hills rested on the sand,
Abele trees glimmered wanly o'er the pines;
With brakes of thorn, and ferny undergrowth:—
A solitude that summer filled with shade
Of silver-gleaming shadows; winter full
Of dreariness—a barren place of ghosts,
Wherein the thorn trees writhed their sombre limbs
Of sinister suggestion, and a rust
Stained all the poplars.
Here Elijah Hurst
By chance had seen the sisters, where the tract
Of wilderness, divided long ago
By what had once been roadway, now again
Closed up its heart against the feet of man.
Unseen of them he watched her with warm eyes
For whom his soul were forfeit. Then her fate—

If such a thing as fate be in the world—
Laid hands about and turned her so she saw
His watching from the gloom among the wild;
But told it not, save only to her heart
Through all the night that followed and the day.

For him he haunted it for many days,
Until he felt the melancholy Thing
In all his blood; like to the thing he craved
That tempted him from Godward womanwise.
Safe harbourage it seemed for his desire,
A secret place to nourish secret sins
Among the shameful limbs that writhed, and bound
His sense and soul.
And when at last—alone—
She next came there, with feet that trod in hope
And fear as many times as she her heart
Heard beating in her bosom, there they met.

Love lives the liefer for a lonely land:
And love was easy speaking on his lips
Where every word had helpmate in her ears,
That had not listened only had they lost
Their power to hearken to their pulse of life.

These things were in December, when the sun
Makes western afternoon a crucible
Wherein is melted finest gold of heaven,
When clouds are brown that cross it, and low rays
Bring the brown birch woods into winter bloom.
In such an hour their meeting: and her soul
Drank of the glory golden from the west,
The while his words were golden as the hour,
And as the gold of heaven all her dreams.
Deep sheltered in the wilderness at last
They found themselves, and waited for the dusk:
And when a star first flowered in the thorns
He drew her close, and for the first time kissed
Her mouth that clung to his so that his soul
Grew softly dark with craving for her lips,
Then kissed her eyes; and all the place for her
Was softly dark with swoon of young desire.
Three times they met by stealth there afterwards;
And ever hiding deeper in its glooms,
As louder grew the clamour in their hearts,
And fiercer and more tender, tenderness.
There Sin they watched, affecting not to see
The warm-eyed things of whispers amorous:

The place seemed full of spirits for them both,
That leagued themselves to aid him with their arts—
Weaving soft spells in which she loved her toils,
And sighing sank the deeper, or would break,
Only to joy the more in rapt return;
Until her wish and will together came
And robbed her of all strength but that of love.
Nerving her senses while he drugged her soul,
Repentance was salvation, so he taught,
That potent lure to lecher's honeyed snares:
And oft she fluttered round it night and day.
But when the new year bound the wolds with frost
And silence lay like death among the thorns,
A man and woman went in there to sin.

In February, when a thousand rills
Went murmuring along the valley, Nell
Knew first the secret of her sister's shame.
Rose, maddened by her guilt, in sudden fear
Confessed in one wild outburst, and fell down—
Lying in swoon about her sister's feet.
So long she swooned it seemed more like to death
Than life grown mercifully mute and saved

From the intolerable anguish of the soul
A breathless breathing space. When once again
A faint flower blossomed in her cheeks, and Nell
Saw the pale eyelids' fluttered opening
And heard the sighing breath, from respite o'er,
Take up its burden of life's being, Rose
Found a forgiveness stronger than despair;
And told of things that put the sun away.

Then Nell went up across the hill and passed
Into the wild among the hateful trees,
And came upon the man who waited there.
And they walked back towards the valley road,
The while he listened to a tale for him
But too well known now colder eyes could read,
And must read often, in the scroll of lust
The sacrilege that passion wrote as love.
Black guilt had struck him silent so he feared
The sound of his own voice would but accuse
The treachery that fain excuse had found
But that the hands of shame were on his throat
To choke the lies that lurked there: and his words
That came at last were echoes out of hell
Wherethrough a guilty wretch cried nakedly.

And Nell within her heart her sister's doom
Heard spoken by another—that his wife.
And when he ceased she stood and watched the pines,
That as a funeral pyre upon the ridge
Smoked in the sunset's conflagration. There,
And while she watched, he prayed her to forgive,
But all her thoughts were otherwhere. The man
Clutched at her arm with shaking hands that stung,
And all his touch spoke treason. Then she saw
Below them, in the valley road, draw near
A farmer's wife whose tongue was Scandal's own,—
A woman Nell detested for a snake.
But Hurst, the preacher, blinded of remorse,
Saw not her coming, and with ghastly lips
Was whispering to Nell to kiss for him
The sister he had wronged. At that she turned,
And in her eyes were things inscrutable.
She, trembling, shut them close, but moved to him;
Said quickly—"Kiss me once"; and she would pass

His farewell on to Rose, and all his words:
Next felt his lips—unflinching though they clung
Like hateful shame upon her own; and then
Went silently from him she saw no more.

Ere the last windflower of that spring had blown,
Nell with her sister passed from out the vale,
And hid their life in London; for the shame
Of dreaded shadow now was certainty.
In stupor Rose lived on; with stricken eyes
That feared the light, and long since drained of tears
In one the fountain of whose tears was dry;
A broken flower, and bruised to death for sure,
But that a sister's arm had lifted her,
And with calm, fearless hands kept off the winds
That blow about the world in seeking out
And screaming over things that hide from shame.
And when her time was near upon her, Rose
Prayed Nell to take her back there if she died,
Where in the valley both their parents slept;
And where they once had dwelt in peace. . .
The child
Was healthy, and the mother lived. But Nell,
With eyes that watched unceasingly for aught

That might retard her sister's bid for life
Of other than a shameful misery,
Saw she was fretting, deathward for the hills,
And for the wildflowers laughing in the meads
Along the valley. London never smiled;
And fain would she have crept back to their
home
But for the shame she dared not front.
The place
Was still as they had left it,—the old dame,
Now dead among her people,—still their own.

By now the child was near a twelvemonth old,—
A fairy mite, who with her mother's hair
Had darker eyes.
Then Nell first told of her
Who saw them kiss, above the valley road;
And she acclaimed herself indifferent
To scorn of man or woman or the world;
And asked to be the mother of the child.
And for the shame she laughed at it; and drew
A picture of their old life, with the child
Shared of them both in secret.
So at last,
When Christmas made the watercourses mute

In all the lower valley-level's snow,
And a great frost had silenced all the winds,
The two returned; and Nell, with Rose's child
Held tightly in her arms, took on the shame
That was their Yuletide greeting through the vale;
Wherein the prophecies the woman spoke,
With Scandal's passion of cold lust, had found
Already credence—now to be confirmed.

Long lay that winter heavy on the land;
And heavy-hearted Rose was; till a day
When a warm south wind came across the hills.
And of a sudden all the valley waked
With murmured voice of liberated snows,
In hurry from their prison-house of frost
To mix them with the mighty Mother's joy,
That swept in sun and shadow for the spring.
And Rose went out into the garden ground,
And watched the long white seed-plots reappear
And hoar again the apple branches grow.
Then thawed the frosts of winter from her heart
In great glad tears that washed her soul of sin.
And Nell, who saw, went quietly and laid
The child within her mother's arms and tears:

While from the oldest apple tree a thrush,
Who there had sung unheard through all one spring,
Burst into song: and winter passed away.

In London, Nell by chance had met and loved,
With passion that is as God's breath in life,
One who had loved her at first sight, but urged
His suit in vain. For Nell had put aside
The love of man, save only from her heart:
Therein she gave God praise for having loved.
A young man, author and a painter, he
Whom the girl loved: he knew not of the child.
For ere they met she had in secret thought
Planned how to lift her Rose's life from shame.
Therefore she bade her lover love no more,—
Breaking her heart to bend it to her will.

Three years the sisters watched their little flower—
The baby Rose—grow upward in the sun;
Nor any blight fell on their rosebud's bloom.
Three years of peace, where striving to forget
Was all their trouble.

Then an illness came

Upon the child, who sickened near to death.
And maid and mother watched with mother's pain
The shadow falling through those days of spring
Across a world of sunbeams filled with song.
Nell stood one evening, when the light was gone,
Alone in anguish by the cottage door,—
Her virgin bosom aching for the child.
But Rose kept vigil in the room above
Beside the little one. The air was calm
As all the place was quiet—save the bell
That led the sheep, slow grazing, through the night
Along the hillsides. Once a bird sang late
From out the hazels in the copse behind,
Blue-shadowed in dusk mystery; where dreamed
Dumb nightingales, who bided there in tryst
Against the amorous comings from the south,
In patient passion mute. But to the girl
The little life was all for her of spring
Upon the world in that calm evening close . . .
Steps sounded through the briars: and the gate
Swung to the entrance of a form her soul,
From years' communing in the dark of dream,
Had known amid a moonless midnight. Then

Ernest, her lover, clasped her hands and called
Once, quickly, through the shadows: "Nell! My
Nell!"
And she for very love's sake in reply:
"Oh Ernest!" and more softly, "Let me bide.
It cannot be!"—and fain had told him all.
But he, grown hungry through his barren years,
Stopped short her words with kisses suddenly,
And held her to him so his passion beat
Like flame around her senses; and she sighed
And lay all subject, broken in his arms. . . .
Then like a spirit wailing cried the child.
And to his soul the meaning with the cry
Sprang from the riddle that had balked his love;
Nor unrevealed the secret any more,
When, like a moan, the woman broke from him.
And pity bade him question not, though Love
Beat all his wings to death in wild despair.
For in her face dumb Misery gone blind
Stared at him, stricken speechless, reft of sight,
Of its own self. And he had turned to go
But that a woman's voice came: "Oh my child!
My baby! Oh my baby!" and he stood,
Without the door, like one who waits on hope
Beside the gate of fear. He heard "Good-bye";

And saw her vanish, whom he late had held,
Into the house; and then he followed her—
To stand within the doorway, wondering.
Then Rose ran down, and saw him standing there,
Stopped, and stared hard a second, but went on
About her errand, and returned again
And passed the stranger, breathless in her haste.
There, afterwards, that night he heard the tale.
And Rose within his hands her sister's laid;
Kissed Nell; and crying softly, left the two
To make their peace in private, while she sobbed
And prayed beside her own—child of her sin.
Wherefrom the Shadow with the morning passed:
And the child lived, and smiling fell asleep.

When April flushed with coming life of May
Through all her bosom; while a mist of blue
Lay, like the vapour of an azure rain
Dyed deep with heaven, through the oakenshaws,
Copses of hazel, and lush windrows green,
Nell and her lover made them man and wife,—
Their home with Rose.
And there for them next year

A daughter blessed their marriage. And the child
Grew strongly, hazel eyed, and large of limb,
And even as her mother's was her hair
For darkness. But a second child was dead
Ere light was ever in its eyes; and Nell
For long lay feeble,—this in their next year
Of wedded love that nothing else had marred.

Now little Rose—(the other child a "Nell")
With years become a quiet little maid
Who kept a solemn counsel of her own
In eyes that grew more serious and dark—
It seemed had longings for the higher lands,
And shunned the meadows. So when Nell lay ill,
After her dead-born infant, and they missed—
One afternoon in autumn—little Rose,
Her mother sought with Ernest in the hills
Behind the cottage; and among the thorns—
Not having found—they went some ways apart
And called, and searched the thickets, but in vain;
Until they came together suddenly.
Then in that moment all the place grew strange,
The while they stared a space and with soft eyes
Towards each other: and in Ernest's heart
He knew a sinful something waking there:

And Rose broke out in blushes—stammering
About the child; and frightened at the thing
Which brought her blushes, turned from him and passed
Out of the thorns, and shuddered as she went.
And then they found the little maid asleep—
Upon her mouth the stain of dewberries.

When Nell at last grew into stronger life
She had been glad to find a way to death;
For Rose fell ill, and in her illness spoke
Wild things, in one delirious moment's tongue.
Of love for Ernest, dark with horror, guilt,
And such a shame as made her former sin
Seem venial by contrast. But she nursed
Her sister back to life, and prayed her own
Might give her strength to bear the greater wrong
In silence and in secret. For there came
A day when in her heart she knew the man
Who was her husband loved her sister more.
Nor ever day was wanting now to show
Some bitter proof that made her long for death
But for her little daughter's sake.

The two,

After their meeting in the thorns, had strove
Against the thing with horror. But their blood
Seemed to have taken up a poison there
So softly hideous, subtle of desire,—
Though hard and long they fought it,—that their veins
Ached ever now to meet there once again
And see each other stare with guilty eyes,
Among the shameful trees. But neither spoke
Of love, but rather kept apart; and both
Prayed that the woman they had wronged in thought
Might never guess, nor suffer by their sin.
Then Rose would take to going there alone;
And Ernest leashed his cravings and remained,
For all he knew by instinct of her goal.
And when he went would Rose keep to the house,
Yet knew the manner of his going there. . . .
But when the new year bound the wolds with frost
And silence lay like death among the thorns,
A man and woman went in there to sin.

From that day onward Nell was stricken down
Upon a bed she never left alive,

But lay and waited for the end she knew
Was coming; but she made no sign she knew
The other thing. One day she asked her man
To marry Rose when she was gone. And he,
His soul 'twixt shame and sorrow racking him,
Had told her all, but deemed it then more kind
To hold his peace; save that he would wed Rose
If so it might be, as she asked.
But Rose,
The night her sister died, came to the bed
And lay there like to death herself; until
A frightful passion of remorse laid hold
Upon her so she screamed her infamy,—
In frenzy for forgiveness ere she died.
And Nell's great heart made answer with a smile—
Affecting not to understand, and breathed
But some farewell of whispers to her child
That slept beside her, and it beat no more. . . .
Then Ernest kissed his dead wife once, and said:
"Thank God she never knew!" But Rose was dumb
Before her sister's silence, and afraid
So that she dared not kiss her dead, but lay

Prone in a death-watch on the floor all night,
The while her soul did penance deep in hell.

A year the cottage held them, and apart,
Nor ever either went among the thorns.
Then Ernest spoke again what Nell had wished,
As they walked home together from her grave
One Sabbath morning. All the valley drowsed,—
It was the hot high noontide of the year,
When July lays a flame upon the land
And a blue light comes over bramble leaves
In the pleached dusks of summer-darkened
woods.
But in her heart were ashes and dull pain
She knew would leave her never; so she craved
That year at least might pass ere they were one.

It chanced that Ernest left her after Yule
To visit London—there on business called.
And Rose, in afternoon, ere he returned,
Left the two children playing, and went up
Into the hills and passed among the thorns;
Drawn there by sudden impulse, that compelled
Once more her heart to hearken to the thing

That cried within her blood. There she sought out
The thorns that first were witness to her shame;
Shivered and moaned, and wept her bitter tears,
And called on her dead sister to forgive;
Nor in her anguish heeded that the night
Came swiftly, till the thickets all were dusk.
And in the dusk a man was watching her,
Who stepping lightly on the leaves came close,
Then whispered wildly, "Rose!"—so that her heart
Scarce dared to beat for fear. And then she saw,
Cried out, and panted, "You!"—then failed of words.
Elijah Hurst had hidden in the brakes,
Since the first frost of autumn, many times—
But sometimes watched the cottage from the hills,
And there had seen her with the other man.
His wife had died: and he returned to claim
The girl his lust had made his in the years
When they had loved among the thorns. And yet
The place laid potent hands upon his soul,
And all his blood was bondslave to its spell;
Till passion mixed with madness of such love

As he had never known in by-gone years.
His face was dark with longing as he told
The fury that possessed him; punishment
That had been his for years:—she must forgive,
And let him right the wrong. And, as she heard
Him who had made her mother, all her flesh
Turned to him; but her soul, with loathing fraught,
Clave to the other, and shrank back in fear
From the dark eyes that searched it. Then the man,
Knowing for him were better death than life
Without her, came to take her in his arms:
But when he saw her eyes he kept away.
For Rose saw standing there between the thorns,
Amid a place of moonbeams, sister Nell;
And from her tortured senses love of man
Faded, and left her only with desire
Of peace with her lost sister. And it seemed
Nell knew, for of a sudden, wide her arms
Stretched out towards the living she had loved.
And Rose cried once the dead girl's name, and fell
Amid the place of moonbeams 'twixt the thorns:
Or e'er his hand had touched her she had died.

Above the thorns the silent heart of night
Filled with the white peace of the moon. Below,
The man knelt, praying softly by the dead;
And speaking tender words and pitiful
Himself would answer. But when came a cry
Upon the hills he rose, and breathing hard,
Sought for and found the drug wherewith he eased
The pangs of conscience through the nights of hell
When Memory went mad along his brain.
And as he followed her he heard her name
Cried through the dusks of death, amid the thorns.
Where Ernest came with lights and found them there.

* * * * * * *
* * * * * * *

They laid her by her sister: but the man,
Self-slain, they buried lonely by the wall.
And there would little Rose, in after years,
Come many times; and to the younger child
Read by the graves; or quietly alone
Would watch and tend her father's. If her tears
Fell there, or if she greatly grieved, none knew.

And some there were who thought she did not grieve.
And some there were who said the girl was strange
And not as other maids are. All agreed
She was a harmless, patient lass enough.

And Ernest took himself another wife,
But had no children.
Many courted Nell:
So she at last was wed; and in the vale
Bore children to her husband.
But for Rose,
She loved no man, it seemed, or none loved her;
Though all agreed her harmless lass enough—
Albeit her mother and her father sinned,
In which some blamed the woman, some the man.
But she, who blamed nor dead nor living, grown
To womanhood, in silence, blamed the thorns.

TO THE MEMORY OF ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

(Died April 10, 1909)

I

This April night that takes into its breath
The nightingale's first passion faint and sparse—
Surely thy name it saith,
Like music in the heath,
A shining music shaken from the stars!
With Song's immortal crown
Though death thy life enthrone,
To-night my soul would humbly look to thine,
Here, where mine eyes looked last upon thine own,
Here, where thy feet a thousand times have trod.
Nor clearer should the starry-circled zone

Burn, than thy glory, if aught be divine
And Love and Truth and Beauty make for GOD.
Shall I not find thee here,
Master? nor know thee near?
I feel the fires of heaven on mine eyes:
Though dark to mortal sight
The earth-line halves the night
I share the endless glory of the skies.
And seems it me the winds have answer given,
Blown earthward from behind the stars in heaven.

2

I hear thine echoes round, as though the world
Fills her own flight with pæans through the spheres
Whilst dying creeds as rotting leaves are swirled
Along the dust of the decaying years,
Till all the tree of Priestcraft's faith be bare
Of fruit or any blossom as of leaves:
Yea, as a god in whom no man believes
Shall surely perish, faith shall perish there.
Before man was were only Truth and Song.

Yea, singer, seer, and prophet,—Master, thou!
Who sawest the future clearly come to pass,
As from some far serene beyond the brow
Of Morning,—and God mirrored in a glass
Wherein are Love and Truth where Fears are now.
When man at last shall forth true and strong
Of his own spirit, Truth shall right the wrong,
The light of very God, that Falsehood mars:
Still shall be heartened April into song,
And there be heard old music in the stars.

3

What shall be said of thee, for poets' part
Of tribute that the world must always owe,
So long as Thought may burgeon into speech,
The language lovely from thy long-ago?
For me be said:—"Thou didst so do for Art
What Art herself shall only do for man."
Whereby The Soul is quick with life to teach,
To all, her truths of Beauty that express
The glory of her spirit's loveliness
Lips breathing baser lifehood never can.

For thee, no more with blasphemies bedight
Shall forceful Fraud disguise the beast it is,
Nor large Untruth add any sun to night
Or star to day by vaunt of sophistries.
But Man's own Truth hast clothed with living light
To justify in song The Harmonies.
One day in his own spirit shall he come
The sweetlier for thy singing to the gates
Of Truth's white temple, wherein Manhood waits,
By orient aisles of Beauty, to his home.
And that great organ of Time's hemisphere
Where never wind nor whisper yet has passed
Shall waken from its silent sleep at last.
Then shall the people answer:—"Man is here!
Love, Truth, and Beauty—with nor hope nor fear,
Nor gains of Gods or Mammon overcast!"

4

The spirits of all winds and seas and suns,
The many-throated music made in spring,
Move in thine own; with that deep chord that runs

Throughout Time's heart-beats, ever echoing.
Yea, Master, is such music in thine own,
That in thy song Time's pulse awakes and falls. . . .
Or with large sounds of wonder
Thy words are rolled in thunder
And boom of breakers on the landward walls. . . .
Where clanging deep to deep reverberant calls
And all the mouths of ocean make their moan,
On seamew pinions glides
Above the swirl of tides
Thy singing, as of sea-winds bred and blown.
Yea, Master, is such music in thine own!

5

Here where thou wendedst I have ofttimes wandered
When the larks hold their joyous evening choir
Until the shadow-lengthening day retire
From off the gorse and broom with gold-dust squandered,
Nor grudge all hours of light their lilt's refrain;
Leaving to dark, laments, for Itys slain,

Of that bright bird thou, living, lovedst so well.
Alas! now nightingale and lark no more
Can charm thy heedless ear; or Death restore
To thee, within thine island tomb, a subtler spell—
Sea voices on the shore.

6

Alas? Nay! Wherefore shall I weep for thee?
Who art not for man's tears but for Time's praise:
Nor shall of man be counted all thy days.
'O sweet strange elder singer," bear with me!
I weary, and awhile am fain for rest;
Oh, lend me of such peace as fills thine own,
An hour!—then of thy strength to feed my breast
(That I may stand alone)
With fire of singing as with fire of flame—
(I ask but of thy strength, not any fame)
Some spark of that which dwells about thy name,
With such a light as burns along the west.
Once more I wait and watch: the day is gone:
Comes night, and a great silence o'er the land:

And down the dusk, like dead leaves blown upon,
Thy footsteps echo past me as I stand!

7

Master! I loved thee! Stay! . . . ah, hast thou passed
Into the southward darkness evermore?
Wilt thou for me wait, even at the last,
If Death's tide turn to shore?
Yea, thou art gone, and never to return,
For all my soul to thee for ever yearn,
For all my soul of thee were fain to learn
That secret sea-way's lore.
Is it but sleep unknown of dreams out there
Where are no stars nor is there any sun?
Hast thou found on that flood fall stars more fair—
Now these of earth are done?
Or with some star death-stricken into air
Perchance thy soul is one? . . .
For thee no more shall winter melt in spring,
Though men should die as larks rise from the heath,
Singing, with but a more ethereal breath,
A happier song to suns in holier skies;

For thee no shrouds shall autumn evenings
bring
When earthly summer dies.

8

Farewell! thou art beyond all joy and sorrow.
Sleep, Master, through the ages, by the sea.
While man shall wake at all to any morrow,
In Song for ever shall thy kingdom be. . . .
Farewell? I feel art near, nor me forsaken!
Strong beats my blood: the battle bugles
sound
Along the world, till all the night be shaken,
And Freedom's wings by Fear no more be
bound. . . .
And surely shall of death no man discover
If in it there be aught, till death befall:
Life still shall good be found to every
lover:
Unborn shall no man love nor live at all. . . .
If in all good things love be found the
best,
Shall there be any kinder thing than rest? . . .

9

For all in vain we question! Not more vainly
The thrush, his speckled breast inflating, strains
With song for him for whom no sound remains.
Nay! were it better, even if more plainly—
Knowing the fruits of Life—we saw in Death
Strange orchard-lands of unknown blossom, 'neath
A changeless sky of light, and always light,
Should we not miss the harvest Death debars—
The seeds which fruit in strife that makes or mars?
If Death were one long day where is no night,
Should we not miss the stars?

SHELLEY

A Criticism of a Criticism.

They say it: "Beautiful and Ineffectual"—thou.
Then is the sun all potent save of fire,
Growth, and the might to swing the spheres and swing
Through their eternal courses night and day.
Nor ever sentient things his face behold
In other wise than rocks do from the hills,
That greet his coming with insensate calm
And with dull veins absorb an age of noons,
Or his death-lights watch drowning on the dark,
Unmoved to aught but colder silentness,—
Than streams and waters shrunken at his breath,—
Than all the hours he kindles that burn down
In viewless ashes drifted over time.
Aye, is his beauty then but unbeholden
That permeates all being save of soul;
Though every evening pool a sunset holds,

Though trivial things against an evening sky—
As kites against a sunset—he invests
With tangible appeal inseparate
From that supreme abstraction which is Soul,
For which their muter insignificance
Is touched to eloquence. And in the lives,
Separate and individual of a myriad men
Shall not thy song be ineffectual—
To kindle hours in which man sees his soul
Clothed with an essence other than of life
Devoted to brute instincts of the blood?
For verily was clad with cloud and beams
Thy singing and as meteors clothed about
With an ethereal murmur from the stars.
Shall not the clouds be ineffectual too,
For drouth and long desire of thirsty lands?
Wherein are souls athirst with longings void—
Seeing that life within the life of flesh
Wants nothing other than of meat and drink,
A house wherein to mate in love or lust,
And temples for the gods that priests have made,
Fine raiment, and the plaudits of its kind
For breath whereof it cries: "Behold a man!"
How many stars have gone to make a man?
Shall not the stars be ineffectual too,

And not their message null and meaningless,
For all it strive through time to reach a world,
O singer of the Unity of Things?

O Song that sang from twilight gulfs in skies,
Wherethrough came morning ineffectual
For earth where men lay darkling—darkling lie,
As early larks to daydawn's audience
Watching faint stars die on the stage of heaven,
O singer of a day that is to be!
O singer of a coming age of Truth!
When man shall knit his soul to otherwhere
Than that chimera of a fabled heaven
Old charlatans, acclaimed God's confidants
In some hereafter, spread about the world
And with old ink of blood made mystical
To catch dull brains as crimson threads do fish.
Aye, though unto this day Hypocrisy,
They warn us, is within the wheels of life
As oil upon hot axles; and that Truth
Long since had left from lubrication dry
The Man-machine, and every train of gears
Whereby the social engines of the world
Drive with their rhythmic motions Change's loom.

Well may this be where lies for truth are taught;
Where Might disguised old custom labels Right
And Mammon fain had kept the people dark
With creeds and consecrations like a cloud:
Whereout a Voice, presumptuous like a priest's:
"Be patient, O ye people, there is Heaven!"
Lest through humilities that were his irons
Man file his way to present liberty.
Most ineffectual was thy scorn of Faith
That herded men by ways of hell and heaven,
O singer of a day that is no more!

Thee shall not love find ineffectual?
O flume of song among the floats of God
That drive the mills of Mingling! to a tune
Of echoes from the fountain-heads of life—
Whilst mirrored in thy deeps is face of her,
Who with soft shining strength doth regulate
The everlasting impulse of the sea
And draw fair flesh of woman round to love—
As ineffectually as thy voice
Touches the soul of love to tenderness
Of many-murmured waters and soft sighs
Swept from some amorous island down the dark.
The love that men do barter for and buy

Shall haply cry thee Poet! But the love
That lives in sun and moonbeams, smiling flowers,
And all the primal purities of spring;
In passion's purest blossoms of delight—
Eyes warm with gentle radiance of joy
And with supreme of tears contentment-glad
When two hearts beat their pulses into one—
For thee shall ineffectual be and vain.
And vain be all that gracious love of friends
That fain would bind a world with Friendship's bonds:
Only for Hate thou sangest liberty!

And ineffectual be thy song for her
Whose name is great among all names that rise
Star-like upon the heavens—Liberty!
O Glorious of all constellated kind,
Whose cradle was the vertebrae of stars!
All things have growth by virtue of thy will,
All—motion! Breath that moves with life
Planets and dust of pollen in a flower:
The first foundation of all Law and last:
Song that was made from silence by a star!
As little ships seek big ones in the night

Upon a tideless sea, all lesser gods
That shall outlast a single night of time
Shall seek thine oracles! And there shall come
The lightnings from thy throne of stars, and flash
The meaning of thy Meaning through the spheres!
O Liberty, did Shelley nought for thee?

Nay, Poet! By the waves that stopped thy heart,
By fire that would not burn it, shall thy name
Be carried—by the wave that is the world,
Be carried by the fire that is in song!
Till only Truth, and Liberty, and Love
Shall be the Gods that lend man heart of grace.
O "Beautiful and Ineffectual"!
Who soundedst through thy golden harmonies
The noblest truth the world shall ever hear:—
Of Progress latent in the human soul;
That Time's Titanic birth of after years,
The Mighty Mind of Darwin, went to prove
The fundamental Purpose men call life,—
The keynote for the orchestra of God.

THE PILGRIM'S WAY

We wander there on divers days,
My soul and I, through ways of dream.
To me its lonely landscapes teem:—
A very world of Pilgrim's Ways.

Where pilgrim suns their daily arc
Transfuse with slow transplendency;
And to mid-heaven's majesty
Translate on wings of song the lark

Or on the downland ridges high
Pass over silent ones in crowds—
Majestic, solemn, smiling clouds,
The mute assemblies of the sky.

Or shouting winds, that stamped the seas
A little lapse of hours before,
Rush on, and, tempest-throated, roar
Through straining cordage of the trees.

Or in some evening-close of calm—
'Mid thymy places of the chalk
I feel around their whispered talk,
Their fragrance, all my soul embalm.

I know there is then that distils,
From lower things of life, the pure;
A blessing strangely sweet as sure—
A holiness among the hills.

I lose myself in that still air,
And find in losing such a peace
That sudden had my ways to cease
I would that they might finish there;

And be made one with air and earth;
And mix me with sepulchral chalk,
And in the life of flower and stalk
There every spring be brought to birth.

* * *

There, though are dreams that fade like stars—
That, star-like, never wholly fade
From out the brain—are open laid
Some dreams that fade more like to scars.

And if to peace, that men have known
By wondrous ways of wedded love,
I let a wistful fancy rove
To find a solace not my own—

'Tis but my faith may falter not
In Life, where Life is all my faith;
Nor—if my bridal-peace be death—
My faith before my body rot.

And though I crave a little joy
Before I last lie down to sleep—
I did not make my blood to leap
For sorrow I was born a boy.

* * *

There, also, pilgrims oft I meet,
Long dead who are alive to-day;
That, thinking on their Pilgrim's Way,
My dreams stretch out like hands to greet.

Like humble hands grown warm with love
To give great thanks whene'er we pass:
I often meet them where the grass
Is green against the blue above;

Long hillsides where my fancy lurks
And wide blue eyes of scabious flowers
Watch wistfully the skies for hours.
And there I seem to see their works

Sweep past, as on some mighty wind
Through all a world of divers lands:
Spread out, by men of mighty hands,
The works of men of mighty mind.

And there the men of mighty soul
Come quietly and stand at gaze,
And dream at what the distance says,
And hear a soundless thunder roll.

And glorious there Art's mighty ones
Stand wrapped in dreams of god-like thought.
And there in living marble caught
Shines on the fire of Grecian suns,

To make her deathless meaning plain.
And holy there Madonnas mild
From star-like eyes above the child
Rebuke the baser lusts of men.

* * *

And there I see him, where he stands
Wild-eyed and fearless on the brow.
It seems he waits in tryst. And now
Another comes and takes his hands

Across the ways of life and death.
And with a cry from out the stars
I hear arraigned before the bars
Of Truth and Man the God of Faith.

And then an awful silence falls.
The soundless Voice of God is heard.
And God has spoken, and His Word
Is—TRUTH. And from the judgment-halls

The two great brother-singers come.
And Shelley Swinburne's hand again
Holds, saying: "Brother, not in vain
We sang to strike the liar dumb."

And he who lately went from us
Turns with calm light about his eyes.
And thus they pass toward the skies.
Yea, there in dreams I saw them thus.

And as they fade amid the blue
A star of streaming song-cloud floats
Above and rains its radiant notes:
And with the lark they pass from view.

Above. Before me, as they pass,
Goes by, below, a little breath
Of dust, and wastes amid the heath
And vanishes among the grass.

Below. Forgotten dust that screamed
Its little spites and hates and fears;
Forgotten of men's eyes and ears
As gods whose lips with lies were seamed.

* * *

And there, his eyes a starry mist,
The great white one hangs bloody-browed,
With all the anguish of him loud—
The blasphemy of men and Christ.

That sin of thine, O Nazarene?
Hast cleansed thyself with bloody sweat?
Has not enough been poured out yet
To keep thy tree's roots wholly green?

And yet there is much more of love,
    Than lies, about thee, Nazarene!
    I often see thee when the green
Grows dark against the blue above.

Much love, as hate in them who go
    About thee in thy naked shame,
    And to the murder of thy name
Have sung thy praises high and low.

As, mouthing Christ, they crucify,
    On myriad crosses wrought of gold,
    The wretched sheep who seek thy fold
And find salvation—when they die.

How long, O Christ, shall this be well?
    For all thy blood and tears and ruth,
    Till man shall worship but the truth
In vain the truth *thou* hadst to tell.

Till man shall see them what they are
    Who make thy promise but a cloak
    Above the laboured breath they choke,
Shalt thou be these things' avatar.

E'en yet Religion's large pretence
Would put the robes of heaven on
Authority's putrescent sun—
That fen-fire lamp of impudence.

E'en yet shall souls of men be slaves
By priestly bribe or patient fear? . . .
Christ, *wouldst* thou have thy kingdom here
Fall down into the dust of graves?

Would that she held more truth of thee
Though all earth's skies were always blue!
But now the Bible's truth is too
The liar's apt apology.

These things, O Christ, be said of me.
(As one who wrought with hands and brain
Along the toiling ways of men)
Leave but the lie nailed to the tree.

Come down, and be a man, and win
A place no smaller soul can reach;
Acclaimed as first of all who teach,
Who loved the sinner, hating sin.

Unless be Manhood only man
By virtues born of beak and claw,—
Him greatest with the largest maw
Since pterodactyl-truths began.

Come down, and see thy kingdom come!
Yet may it hap till Toil has burst
The throats of Greed grown Godhead first
That Hate's high priest be stricken dumb?

I have no head, for thee as God,
To bow; nor make I any prayer.
But, did I see thee standing there,
True priest of true men's-brotherhood,

I would kneel down and humbly pray
To thee to teach me what might serve—
Some work of mine men's hearts to nerve
Along some future Pilgrim's Way.

Some song that might refresh the root
For flowers of Manhood truth shall breed,
Ere men no more with golden seed
Furrow the matrix of the brute.

* * *

I see man's temples on the plains;
Upon the hills his temples are:
I often see there from afar
The wind catch fire upon their vanes.

And some have spires and some have none.
But all are wrought of men to prove
The God of Hell the God of Love.
They built them theirs in Babylon.

Men say more glorious there they built.
I have no doubt they built them well,
The God of Love the God of Hell
To prove, and proved him to the hilt.

But these be wise men. Poets fools
Have been acclaimed since fools began.
I know myself a foolish man,
And, in a land where Mammon rules,

Am glad to find some place of flowers,
Where wild bees come and murmuring climb
With honeyed song among the thyme:
I love to watch them, hours on hours.

And sit with them, and ponder there.
And, as was ever with such fools,
I wonder *why* that Mammon rules
A land grown wise and old in prayer.

And there on hopeless pilgrimage
A woman's shape of Hunger goes:
For apes within a cage of clothes
A money-monger clears a stage.

And thinking thus, I wonder WHY
That Mammon rules: and then I know
Religion's cloud will have to go
From off the earth—when off the sky.

No pictures of Eternal Bliss
May longer patient keep the poor:
Truth drives dishonoured from her door
The trickster-god of centuries.

I see Thee Unborn criticise
The Pilgrim's Ways whereby we passed.
"The deaths (they slowly say at last)
Of Gods and Mammon synchronise."

* * *

And fraught with passion pure above
The lust of loves that harlots' are
The Future stands for avatar
To glorify the sex of love.

I doubt ideals of sexless love
Be other than Perversion bears:
Not by that Pilgrim's Way the years
To future-far horizons move.

But rather, somewhere down the past,
A road there was for Two in One—
A lonely Thing that saw the sun,
One day, another shadow cast.

'Tis not my fancy but has guessed,
In idle moments, idle things;
The thought about my bosom clings
Whene'er I look upon my breast.

And that same sun—who witness bore
To wondrous workings time has known
In sex some other than my own—
Confirms Duality the more.

Who says, no more the years divide
That sex in twain that was the One,
Unseals the silence of the sun
To warn a world of men he lied.

But neither now is her distress
Good reason that his strength is more,
Whose strength though multiplied a score
Had hardly made the mammoth's less.

The mammoth and his might are dust
Beneath some fallen forest's own:
I hear a holier trumpet blown;
And love is lovelier for its lust.

I see the Woman stand at last—
An equal Soul with Man's to save:
Life makes them equal as the grave—
Since clouds of cant are overpast.

* * *

Yes, as I sit and ponder there,
These things before my vision rise:
I feel such wonder through my eyes
I doubt if more they well could bear.

But, as with fools, I wander off
On wild bees' wings by Fancy lent,
To damp waste places dusk with mint
And all the green delights thereof.

And drink their fragrance deep: or cull
A moral from the musk-rose bloom:—
That, though life's end should be a tomb,
The world is very beautiful.

With Beauty which for ever lives
From starry things to things of earth:
Some deem it but of little worth;
And see in sunsets—*adjectives.*

On wild bees' wings along the downs,
Through ferny hollows dark with pine
And places sweet with wild woodbine,
That many a bramble bosket crowns.

Cool coverts carpeted with green
Where primrose lights of spring had shone.
The hazels whisper, "On, and on!"
Some pilgrim loitered there, I ween.

The forebears of those trees a staff
    Perhaps provided. Or to rest
    He sank, and finished there his quest.
Belike they speak his epitaph.

On wild bees' wings among the fern;
    And watch green lizards in the sun
    Like flames of emerald wild-fire run;
And on again, and then discern

Winged fairy flakes of moonlight-blue—
    The butterfly of chalky hills;
    Whose joyous agitation fills
The noonday night of some old yew.

* * *
* * *

Though under heavier skies my home,
    Far off that Pilgrim's Way I sing,
    I know that as I write the Spring
Is moving there; and long to roam.

Through ways of dream my soul and I
    Go out to where the feet of her,
    To Kentish fane from Winchester,
Along the Pilgrim's Way go by.

Feet pacing slow as yet, but strong;
Soft feet and bright with shine of showers;
Light footsteps leaving prints of flowers
And echoes that break into song.

Now, veiled with nights of starry tone,
The world's great lovers come, and meet
And kiss. I hear their pulses beat
The patterns of their blood to one.

And hasting, southward set my face
To where the cloudy hills are dim.
And as I go I make a hymn,
And sing it in some lonely place

When that old road I strike once more.
Yea, all my heart is full with thanks.
And there I meet them, ranks on ranks,
The pilgrims I have met of yore.

I meet them . . . all? It matters not
That one, my boon-companion there,
Comes nowise now: when days are fair
There comes a silence in my throat.

Sometimes. . . . It matters not. Above
His throat is filled with song: he sings
On mortal, of immortal, wings,
And all the Pilgrim's Ways of love.

* * *

And there I see a Woman kneel,
A child's face there among the shades;
That dream, alas, that dream-like fades—
The unborn child some women feel.

I watch the slow earth-children climb
The tree of life towards the star.
By Pilgrim's Ways that Women are
I see them scale the heights of Time.

The love we bear our Motherland,
In holier pulses of the blood—
The glorious love of Motherhood,
The easier there I understand.

* * *

Yes, as I write, out there I know
The Spring moves with soft feet of her,
From Kentish fane to Winchester.
I hear her footsteps, and I go.

BLAME THOU NOT LOVE!

Blame thou not Love, if, blinded of the stars,
Thou wast more tender than the world allows—
Grown old, in growing wise.
Nor deem true wisdom every compact bars
Between love's lips and longings, save with vows
Might barter-men devise.
Blame thou not Love, if he whom thou didst call
"Lover," as women speak to silence shame,
Loved thee in spring and left thee ere the fall:
The blame were thine or his, not Love's the blame!
Blame thou not Love, should passion maze thy soul
With stormy splendours over day and night,
Or visions of inviolable peace,
Wherein, by grace of Him, might'st make thee whole
When gracious arms have drawn thee through delight
Of his last ecstasies,

Though one with dreams that die from lack of life
She, whom thy votive dreamings made, becomes;
Though thou shouldst live to learn thy hero's wife
Is mated to a many martyrdoms;—
If these things come upon thee, blame not Love!
But taking thought take comfort. Wherefore, kneel
The while some shadow saith
A few small words the quiet wings above,
That never more Empyreal pulse may feel.
"Love led himself to death."
Belike, or, *"Sunfire smote him through the head,*
As one that lived intolerable days,
Whose knights had drawn him Godward! He is dead." . . .
But one smooth white wing-feather! . . . Go your ways.

But one smooth white wing-feather? Yea, and this,
Haply, amid your bosom evermore,—
It once beat nigh to God.

Sometime, long after sunset's harmonies
Have hushed themselves to sleep along the shore,
Go out there, softly shod.
And standing, fling your feather on the tide;
And the wan white foam-water shall conceal
That last of Him for ever, or decide
If it be such all ocean may not steal.

And if it be? Or hate, or scorn, or worst
Of all things left from love—indifference,
One sharp short breathing-space
Shall leave you lovers; and the dark shall burst
Amid the matrix of the night's immense
So shall come forth such face
As once with lovers' eyes ye saw grow dear
Beyond all other faces. So shall come
Forgotten hungers harshly on you there,
Old tenderness grown grievous. . . . Get ye home!

If these things come upon thee, blame not Love!
Say rather, Life without Him would be less
Than such as brutes may breed.

Who once hath loved hath lived all else above
  Less liberal lusts may glean from selfishness,
    Whereon doth hatred feed.
Whoe'er have loved! give thanks, though it be done,
  Yet stay not over-long beneath the stars:
Make ye your match with Memory in the sun,
  Lest in the night he take you unawares!

MARCH

The magic of March is upon me, a sense of the world
Astrive in the sap of the limbs of the striving trees.
Shining arms of the wind with a shout are about me curled.
Sunbeams lighten the flowers for beginning bees.
The primrose touches my sight as though 'twere a tender place
Where the nerves of the soul respond to the hand of tears
When joy is a thing grown dim in the eyes, as a longed for face,
Come from the dark, redeems the sorrow of sunless years.
Is it rain in their dewy depths where the eyes of the violet
Glow deep with delight and leaves? or is it my own are wet?

O glorious wild glad thing
Gone into my blood to-day,
Where glamours of gold that swing
From heaven's high arch of grey
And under each tasselled spray
Are making their magic good. . . .
The air it is as a flood
That mirrors the moving sky.
And fleets of the clouds go by
Whilst wonderment they unload:
I breathe, and they fill my blood
With silence, and haste away.
Or joy that is grave and gay
Comes on as I breathe again,
Shadow and shine of rain,
Laughter and loud caress
From mouths of the winds that press
The print of their singing way
All over earth's nakedness.
The heights of thy maddest mood
Methinks I had understood
The hardlier were it less—
That depth of thy tenderness,
Where hazels are whispering

And the grey oak trunk and the green
Stand over the celandine
And watch all the waking wood.

O March, thou art made as man!—
As a man that lives
For a passionate quest through a world that is made with strife.
I have heard thee speak *"Alone"* as only a human can;
And the sound of thy searching gives
The hint of an echo that hides in the breasts and the hair of a wife.
And as a man thou art become, O March, and human,
That all day long dost search the wolds and hills!
Where there are primroses and daffodils
Thou goest like a lover for her sake:
Thou wouldst be fierce and tender in the brake:
Thou art as man, and April is thy woman!

A GARDEN IN THE FIELDS

Outside, the unmown meadows are that gleam
With all their white-and-golden margarets;
As though some ploughing of the starry team
Gave earth another Galaxy, that sets
When the scythe comes, and no man quite forgets
Who once was child though gone be grace of dream. . . .
When the stars go, how the stars shine,
None may, who may forget all else divine.

With all the sweets of scent and sound she wears,
When bees' wings move in her wide honeyed zone
To one soft song, the lime tree shades and shares
This rose-garden's full fragrance with her own.
As fragrant as are roses kissed upon
By Evening's amours under early stars
Her shadows are. . . . They seem to keep
In their green dusk a sense of things asleep.

IN MEDIAS RES

Along the grass
Below dark beeches russet-stained with fruit
Dank bindweeds pass,
Where but for sound of myriad flies are mute
The brakes of shining privet, sickly sweet
From half white blossoms over-blown:
The scattered fallen fragrance round their feet
Still breathes of rain that bruised and beat them down.
But in the privet boughs
No bird to-day dares to be amorous,
While glooms with their grey faces watch his house.
Midsummer here makes manifest her grief
Bereft of him and in the midst of things—
Nay, Love himself hides fearful like a thief,
Somewhere, with frightened plumage on his wings.

When, like a clarion through those ash trees, hark!—
The thrush confirms his tenure and his love.
The shadow on the woods yields up its dark
With half reluctant haste to beams above.
The sun smiles: and a wind grown warm and glad
Goes by, and there is that within its tune
Whereof the world takes comfort being mad
With God's insanity of summer noon.

IN AUTUMN

I see the sun grow old,
Grow grey and old, and, full of quiet, creep
From the still slopes and chasmed ways of clouds
That fill the frontiers of his place of sleep:—
Wan suns, that bleach the shadows cast
On stubble-fields all day with mist of gold,
Where evenings—each one earlier than the last—
From golden mist prepare their paler shrouds.
As nightfall gathers stars with viewless hand,
So death goes wide and gathers in the dusks:
The sharp white breath of morning on the land
Gleams whiter for the empty chestnut husks.

WOOD-SORREL

Though purple Pasque and white anemone
Unfold their trembling stars to April skies,
That sensitive soft closure of thine eyes—
Is it not well with thee?

Haply the dark doth weigh upon thy joy?
Rain and the night,—with these, as one afraid,
Thou dost thy simple artifice employ,
Wild Wood-Sorrel, small shamrock of the shade.

Wild Wood-Sorrel, O wild white Wood-Sorrel!
O triple-heart of lovely little leaves!
That draws mine own heart so my memory
cleaves
To thee, where thou dost dwell.
Hazels are all about thee filled with song;
And freshly fair as their bright burgeoning,
On beautiful broad pinions drives along
The yellow Brimstone butterfly of Spring.

TO GERMANY

IN HER PROGRESS TOWARDS SOCIALISM

From out the hills of India the seed of humankind
Went wandering across a western world;
Till they cleansed them and their faces from the darks they left behind
As the west winds' brighter breath about them curled.
For the sense of things was coming to a planet that had swung
Through old ages but a shape of singing flame.
And the womb of earth conceived again, and born of her there sprung
Fresh fruit of primal Purpose: and her name
Was Liberty—the first of names to be,

Though as yet for little else than noumenon—
Blind as yet and knowing little but the instinct to be free:
In her soul the endless calling of some everlasting sea—
As the Volga and the Danube felt their passion's mystery
And the twins of one white bosom, Rhine and Rhone.

Though the rages of the jungle ran as ravin in their blood;
Though the tiger was tenacious of his lust;
Though their eyes shone bale and murder; though their souls were unsubdued,
Save of death and many women, as their dust;
Though they wrested and they ravished so to glut them was to live
Such as life found only good, nor made them laws
Where all law was but The Strongest's, Love at last there came to give
Men to Manhood, and the tiger shed his claws.
And they went upon the mountains and the plains,

And in long-forgotten forests made their home.
And the Roman found them stronger than the strongest of his chains,
For they carried seed of Liberty like passion in their veins,
And the Roman spake it of them, and the thing he spake remains—
That their women were a pattern unto Rome.

And the ages passing slowly saw the later Caesars rise:
And the tyranny of later Rome began;
Till was humbled there a continent about the feet of Lies:
But Germany was waiting with the man.
And the voice of Luther thundered; and although they sought to burn,
Poison, torture, maim, and murder as they might,
Mostly in the south they did it, northward men began to turn
To the first far beams of morning from the night.

England's Channel and the German Ocean saw
God's great mercy manifested on his priests,
Till the whole Armada vanished in his mercy and the maw
Of the seas that sucked up Spain and leapt with mercy's iron paw
On her warships and them mangled, as with mercy tooth and claw
A tiger tears his victims at his feasts.

Shall our England's Newton nothing owe thy Kepler, Germany,—
They who tireless tracked the secrets of a star?
Or thy galaxies of Science that shall light the world to be
Darken at the isle where Darwin's ashes are?
Shall blood-brotherhood be broken that has drawn Religion's fangs
And sterilized the poison-pest of popes?
Comes a day when Truth for manhood like a star in heaven hangs
And the Peoples by her aid shall find their hopes.

Shall be known then, undisguised of gold or priest,
Gods that scorned him, helping Mammon in his needs.
Though a score of Christian kaisers yet may clench a mailèd fist
And with mighteous abnegation make appeal to Jesus Christ—
For whose teaching, but for priests and kings, might now be socialist
All the lands to which the star of Freedom leads.
Shall not England then acclaim thee? With a song across the waves
Shall our Motherland not greet thy Fatherland?
Shall their children bow for ever down to Mammon like to slaves?
War, upon their foreheads, Cain-like, set its brand?
Though of surety shall men strive still, when is GOLD but only gold,
When are gods and kings forgotten as its power,

Man shall strive for other freedom than of gilt
Oppression's mould—
On their god and gold alike shall come his hour.
And the time shall be passed over when he thrives
Who is only lord of others' poverty;
Till is war but only murder done on inoffensive lives;
As the day is passed when white men needs must murder for their wives,—
As the day when men for holiness need cut themselves with knives,
O Germany! A welcome unto thee!

BEFORE DAYBREAK

Dream-voices called me,—when the night was late,—
Ere yet the skies held but a single star.
My soul crept darkling out by slumber's gate
To where the sea-banks of the morning are.

To coasts of cloud, where like a falling sea
Night with her winds and stars draws off from day
Into deep waters of Infinity,
My soul by leaguered shadows found a way.

The draining sea-ways of the dark were filled
With gleam of sullen stars; a clanging wind
Far out was moving; nearer, echo shrilled
As from shrunk throats by passing passion thinned.

There crouched my soul, as one who by a tide,
In lonely and waste lands where Death is king,

Keeps mournful watch with ghosts of them who
died
Baffled of love and life and everything.

Around, spent waters of the night went past—
Slow eddies thick with sands of time and
storms,
Where shapes obscene their horrid shadows cast
Like shardbourne things begot from huge sea-
worms.

Then seemed it me that Change, her mighty
womb
Aborting from the myriad growth of years,
Shuddered; and issue thence, as from a tomb,
Pale memories of old Pain grown blind in
tears.

Grown blind in watching for defeated dawn,
Grown blind of tears till quenched all light
within,—
Starved sightless eyes that stared where ever
yawn
The grey abysses that are sorrow's kin.

Came others then, who soothed them with strange gods,
And pictured heavens of eternal calm;
Pitied, and mocked, their blindness; beat with rods;
And to bruised mouths held bloody sweat for balm.

These crowned and robed with signs of Hatred were—
Incestuous Hate, in vesture gilded o'er,
That Avarice and Tyranny from Fear
Inherit as their birthright evermore.

From far among blue twilight wastes of time,
Where man's first-fruits had soul for aftermath,
Came those who watched it struggle from the slime,—
Red-reaping went and shouting, "God is Wrath!"

Then like some ghastly phantasm that Guilt
Weaves through her thoughts with her own stainèd hands

Rose vapors thick with blood fumes priests had spilt,
Wherein the divers godheads choked the lands.

And sinful flesh had priestly purge for leaven;
So only man could hope to move his God
Where burst his soul 'mid flames and shrieks to heaven,
Or quenched his shrieks and sins were in his blood.

Then one came from a city Nazareth,—
A mild man teaching; children at his side.
"Love one another. God is Love," he saith.
And him they hated and they crucified.

And ever grew the sun-obscuring blight
Of altar smoke pontifical and reek:
Wars, and men shouting; battlefields at night,
And priests and spoilers searching cheek by cheek.

With fiercer flames of her own impious Hell
From blasphemous blown breath of priestly liars
The murder-lust of Rome with whine and yell
Sprang up; and beasts like priests went lighting fires.

Truth outraged saw her tortured children slain
And Falsehood's bastard brood grow sleek and thrive;
Saw Bruno's brave strong spirit slip its chain,
Undaunted though his body burnt alive.

And Priestcraft leagued with Kingcraft how to bind
The people soul and body like to slaves;
Teaching to bear all burdens was to find
God's grace and true salvation—IN THEIR GRAVES.

* * *

O Soul of Man, unbroken of the years:
It was for this that Truth a star should weigh?

That gods like these should fill the night with fears
And put back heaven from an earthly day?

Save one word, *"TRUTH,"* what word has any God?
All else is dark as starless midnight's breasts.
While Immortality is Mammon's rod
There is no blasphemy like that of priests.

Now make they moan for fear the people see;
O Soul of Man! heed not the liar's ruth,—
The hoary lies of grey senility
Still masquerading in the guise of truth.

The bait of hopes that led to Mammon's lure—
At last the long conspiracy is done!
O Soul of Man! fear nothing—day is sure:
Truth, dawn-discovered, rises with the sun!

Arise! The word is clarioned like the morn!
And east and west dissilient darks divide!
Shall future ages name it sluggard-born
That Swinburne waked with singing ere he died?

* * *

If these things be not, Soul of Man, in thee—
Shall there be any in thee called sublime?
Nay, life and manhood are but mockery,
And history—a shambles and a crime!

CUPIDO MUNDI

Ye have made me a thing for scorn—ye who
claim to be children of God!
God of all things in all lands and in all of the
waters of earth!
For behold, my name on your lips is as dust of
the earth ye have trod—
I who have quickened a world with the infinite
wonder of birth!
I am fit for a harlot's spoil, for a pander's
greed—
Such priests have ye given me: I have given ye
life.
Stews for my temples, I, and scorn for a place
in your creed—
I, without whom had been nor marriage of man
or wife.
Who hath given ye life but I—His will and His
breath?

Ye who have found life good! wherefore the finger of scorn?
Is it infinite peace ye crave?—the guerdon of death?
Through me ye have found and shall find, for of me ye are born.
Not in the likeness of day, with the eyes of the morn,
But as a starless night is, blind as the sneer beneath—
So have ye graven my image, with dead leaves and dust for a wreath!
So have ye fashioned me, so! and your scorn I requite with a rod,
A scourge from my garland of shame, I healer eternal of dearth!
Who quicken the world with the life and the infinite wonder of God—
So have ye fashioned me, so! even Lust who have given ye birth.

SENSATIONS IN SOLITUDE

Nature, is it well?
I long have loved thee! In thine every mood
When thou hast spoken I have understood.
Why art thou so intolerable become?
Loose me, I say, and let my spirit home!
Loose me in this vague lapse, this last of light
Ere stars are born from bridal-beds of Night,
And let me find such solace as the trees
Have in the dusk embraces of the breeze.
Their murmurs of mysterious meanings hide
The amorous ache of lovers side by side;
Whose twilight talk is commune far above,
Yea, deeper down than language goes for love. . . .
Of love, that lives unutterable things,
Become articulate on muted strings
Of dumb desire, that reft of speech awakes
To murmur and to marvel how it aches
Only, and find no use in any word
E'en ears of two-fold tenderness have heard. . . .

Dreadful the dusk grows, and with veiled de-
light
Somewhere, that hides amid the Infinite,
As deeper stars, of what I may not see
Yet must I feel wring all the roots of me. . . .
What art thou now that comes, that sighest so?
Didst thou and I love in some Long-Ago?
And now, a ghost, dost haunt the glooming wind
At evening, for thy penance where we sinned
In loving by too little or too much?
Is mine to live whilst Memory hints at such
Across a tomb of far forgotten years
That shine and darken down my soul as tears?
My doom to dream; and thine to drift, aloud
For me with Longing, like yon evening cloud?
Did I do wrong upon thee in the days
We met among some fallen forest's ways,
Thou loving where I lusted? Womanwise—
Since seldom man for strength of loving vies
With woman—dost thou strive to get to me,
For that we two were lovers Destiny
Destroyed of swift snake-poison ere we died,
Or of hate's twin-born serpent-sister, pride,
Who fain would kiss forgiveness once, and cease
Where passion comes not ever, only peace?

Dost thou so strive, to shame me, sighing thus
About some twilight of Love's ambitus?
Am I *the tomb?*—to which hast striven long,
Self-shameful, as are women that do wrong
On Love, God's supreme godhead. Am I him
Thou didst go hate—for jealousy, or whim
Of vanity, or sake of spite's revenge,
Those petty powers that bid some women range
To do obedient all their hests on her
Who builds of her own hands love's sepulchre?
Speak! Whosoe'er thou art! I too have sinned,
It may be I have suffered. . . . Hath the wind,
That it should whisper darkling down to death?
All Sorrow might have spoken things it saith. . . .
Hath it no wistful wisdom, nought of speech
For memory, save such as ruins teach
By silent stones and stony silentness,—
No love that is in longing, to express?
No tender truth at Twilight-tide, to move
The soul of man to deeper things of love?
To all this place of shadows, comes no sigh
Breathed forth for pain of pent-up passion, nigh
To swoon from its own long desire and need?
Of these things takes the Nightfall never heed

In all her voices heard in wind or tree?
All ye who may lie lonely, answer me....

High meadow grasses, mourning down the darks,
Hold Song asleep within their latent larks
A-dream of dawn's delirious climb through gates
Of dewy daylight, dearer for their mates
That sent them skyward singing.... May the soul
Whose wings are fed of earth, by love's control
Fare forth to find a heaven, but the one
Whose wings are weary ere the day begun
Lets light upon its lack of love, fare forth
Nowise, though it be night upon the earth?
Nor whisper where a bird may sing? nor find
Some answer ever spake along the wind?....

Hush! O'er yon elm that stands and sways alone
The cloud seems thinner so the stars are blown
Faintly above his brooding shape, that yields
Slow arms to Night among the dreaming fields. . . .
And like a sound a night-swallow went past,
To lead man out of loneliness at last.

BY SLEEPING WATERS

To-day no winds come here.
All Crummock Water feels a trance
On her dark breathless bosom clear.
No longer do white sunfires dance
In fairy fleets and one by one
On Buttermere.
Upon the world the might
Of Midsummer its magic has begun:
And every mountain height
Seems to grow quieter in the sun's sight;
And all things to grow smaller in the sun.

THE WANDERER

All you who needs must hearken! this is good:—
Wind on the hills; and in the valleys, calm;
And sunsets like a sadness in the blood,
Albeit with wondrous power of peace for balm;
And shining on its endless period
The starry Plough within the grip of God;
And the larks' evening hymn and morning psalm.

A FOOL'S DREAM

I saw a man amid a place of stones
Who built a house of dust to dwell therein;
Who, when the wind unbuilt it, in loud tones
Cursed, and another straightway did begin.

And others of his kind to ease their ruth
Were greatly busy in this wise:—
They gathered stones: I saw an altar rise;
Wherefrom one shouted, "This alone is sooth.
Beware, the transitory dust of Truth!
Behold, the holiness of Compromise!"

EVENING: WIMBLEDON

Blue-shouldered birds that sit and scream in
woods,
That haunt the passing splendour on slow
wings
And speed the falling leaf with sudden
cries:—
These—and the wind in low autumnal moods;
Where April's choir of wilding joyance sings
When loom-gales deck the skies.

No other sound: no footfall: the green grass
Gathers the dropping acorns one by one
The jays grow greedy over, gliding down.
And where the smiling white may-blossom was
Gloom, heavy hearted, in a solemn sun
Old thorn-brakes bloody-brown.

Swart bracken and the brambles' spotted death
Fill the fast flagging footsteps of the year.
The poplar has divested her of woe.

And all her spire the wind fills with his breath:—
He that sang Love all day, when leaves were near,
Sings now of Long-Ago.

That bluest of green trees, her sister dark,
No more now borrows dye from azure heaven
To paint her rustling vestures verdurous,
But quietly her limbs are motioned stark:
Where thrushes founded fanes of song at even
Stars find an empty house.

The birch strews every hollow deep with gold
And braids the twilight softly in her hair;
Nor no man comes to mark her lovely loss,
Though in the dusk her beauties yet unfold
(And in the dusk her limbs are very fair)
Seven miles from—*Charing Cross.*

MOOD-MAGIC

As I walked into an April wind
I felt her hair around me roll.
In eyes waxed full of an April mind
I saw my footsteps fill behind
With secret of my goal.

Yet no one followed! I found her there,
And led thereto by a wind-blown Word.
I did not dream she could be so fair!
Against brown bracken her leaping hair
Was fire—but fire unheard.

The place was . . . . just as the place had been:—
The blue sky and the long brown hill;
White flicker of flame on the dark bright
green,—
The hollies her secret share between. . . .
If ever she *was*—they will.

MICKLEHAM DOWNS

Mickleham Downs! Mickleham Downs!
What is *it* that thy beeches hide?
The stoat skims over thy blown hillside;
He stands and stares at me.
Pixie rings, shadowy things,
Sound of a far off sea. . . .
And it rises and falls and drowns
In the voices of wind and tree
As I lie and listen:—They ride! they ride!
Fleet-foot horses that long since died. . .
What shall be said of thee?

A BALLAD OF HELL

The Hell of Priests.—A thing for scorn of men,
And for the hearts of little children, fear.
A lure obscene to bait the traps of Faith,
Where bloody reek of dead men done to death
Cries yet to men for vengeance, drawing near—
When Truth shall cleanse the world of creeds again,
And all their impious calumnies that sere
The unctuous lips of priests with lying breath,
Grown slanderous professing to revere.
A god whose love is half a hatred fell:—
This is the burden of an earthly Hell.

The Hell of Harlots.—Deeper none than this
For those, who, having loved, have sunk to shame—

Who, having once known heaven, from a pit
Through nights and days must see the stars of it
And feel the more their darkness, as their name:
Whose lips have known, and sold love with a kiss:
Who have bought gold to gild their body's blame:
Who needs must hear the Thing of spotted feet,
Where livid shadows of corruption flame,
That waits for women having love to sell:—
This is the burden of an earthly Hell.

The Hell of Drunkards.—Freedom of a slave
With thirst for master, free to feed on fire
And to drink poison, till for poison yearn
The sense and soul, till blood to craving turn
And fill the veins with loathing and desire:
To pluck with palsied hands from manhood's grave
The bittersweet of memories and the brier:

To drain the dregs of dust from dead hope's urn
And mix with madness maudlin tears and mire.
To laugh, and hear the echoes of a knell:—
This is the burden of an earthly Hell.

The Hell of Lust.—Here is the suicide
Of gifts, God-given antidote of dearth;
Soul slain of self, and body dirt defiled
In dying, leaving torture for a child—
The blossom withered to the blight of birth.
The eyes of little children crucified
With pain and punishment to mock their mirth
That once have looked upon him so, and *smiled,*
Shall haunt him till his own have closed on earth
Who enters here—he surely so shall tell:—
This is the burden of an earthly Hell.

A SOUTHDOWN SUNDAY

The green great ridges under skies of cloud:
White scars of chalk: and sheep-bells in the hills.
Where from dusk juniper the storm-cocks crowed—
In all a combe no latent thrush is loud.
The sabbath silence fills
A village. And the climbing road above,
Where scabious flowers fringe its narrow cleft,
—Save only where the murmuring beeches move—
Was not more quiet when the Roman left.

The song of grassy places thick with thyme
In the warm fragrance of the middle year,
When all the sounds of summer seem to rhyme.
The clematis among the dogwoods climb—
The Traveller's Joy is here.
And here for Life's wayfarers there is balm,
Wild marjoram, and drowsy bees there by. . . .
Here the high hills hold a communion calm
With all the silent concourse of the sky.

WHITE WITCHCRAFT

Her hair is fragrant as the musk
Of garden evenings, when the lark
Is down, and God is good to men in dreams.
When cherry orchards pale the dusk
And sheeted bloom-ghosts haunt the dark
Oft have I seen her silent over streams.

If in the meadow water-ways
She hides herself, or if she be
At all, I know not: but I think more fair
She grows now than in boyhood's days.
Hush, 'twixt that poplar and the tree
All blossom! No? . . . . But bitter-sweet grew
there.

MOODS AT MAYDAWN

I waked as one who on the shores of sleep
Has heard afar his pulses' quiet tune,
When in his veins the night has flowed along
To echoes light as those perchance the deep
Hears only from the footsteps of the moon.
Then suddenly there mounts a wave of song,
And makes it morning: so it was begun
For me, that music made before the sun. . . .
The night it was when April is away
Ere the dawn kindles in the eyes of May.

Thereat I rose. And drifting down the world
With twilight foam about the white gean trees
I heard the May-tide making on and on;
Until around my being came and curled
Inundant joy grown deep in mysteries
Revealed as stars are, not by light alone.
In that half dark I heard the thrushes call,
And leaves commune, how from their poplar tall

Another moon would fling a denser shade:
And higher suns would hotlier climb, they said.

In that dim hour I hearkened many things
Come darkling 'twixt the night and day: a shower,
That touched the broad black poplar into tears
Of tremulous delight, meseemed had wings
Whose passing shook the scent from every flower
And brought their fragrant breathing to my ears.
A wind awoke, and through the hawthorn bosk
Went like a lover whispering at dusk;
And starry eyes the cloud had closed awhile
Looked down again and faded in a smile.

In hollow places, hiding from the dawn
The night held her last court. With rumour's breath
Of coming change her hyacinths forsook
The purple of her presence. I was drawn
To watch their myriad host that streamed beneath
Grow larger with each trembling air that shook

The azure of a new allegiance
Over their serried sweets' obedience.
I saw a thrush sweep through them shouting,
"Day!"
They rose in ranks and murmured it was May.

Where couchant bugles lull the ears of Sleep
When she lies out o' nights among her brood
Of dewy shadows, where the glowworms come,
And great moths go with lustrous eyes to steep
Their tongues in honeyed hours beside the wood,
I wandered till I heard a pine tree hum,
Above my head, old things equivocal.
And in my brain his magic musical
Told of forgotten Mays the place had known,
That none remembered save himself alone.

And here the ground was broken up with sighs:
Black heath and gloomy furrows filled with
dearth
Made moan upon the hill and in my heart,
For all I felt the morning in my eyes.
Here like a dark disquiet lay the earth
From heaven's divine dim breast a thing apart.

Till on me too as on the place did seem
Such blind eclipse as Love's celestial dream
Must wear on earth at times, beyond the suns,
When all things men call good go out at once.

So stood I, when there floated high above
A sound of silver music heard afar,
Made by no mortal breathings men employ
But by the life between the lips of Love.
The first lark in the last light of a star
Silvered his song and wings and all their joy
Of beating in blue air. And on me came
Expectancy, desires without a name,
Large as the kindling east, wherein a thrush
Sat burning, mute, upon a golden bush.

A glory grew upon the gorse, untold
By poet yet, nor e'er by painter caught
On some sheer breathless moment's mountain height,
When from each nerve of sense the manifold
Quick chords of Beauty tremble into thought
Too swift for words that brush or pen may write.
Whilst her own auras lit that lonely place
The Maydawn came, like to the living face

Of Love beloved amid the gorse and dew
Of primal planets when the world was new.

Then worked within my soul the yeast of years
That rose to Man, and which some men call
GOD.
I knew that all this glory was my own.
So went I on; and holy to my ears
Earth made her songs for May's white period.
From each thick-budded hawthorn bower blown
Came love's exultant clarion call to joy.
And flowers that timid artifice employ
Against the damps and darks heard too, I wis.
I watched them ope their eyes. . . . But Herb-
Paris
I gathered there, for that for true love is.

MIDSUMMER: MORNING

Go gladly; but for greater joy lie down,
And Joy thy boon and bedfellow shall be—
Here where the parsley-ferns encompass thee
In fairy-forest fashion of their own.
And here, within the breath of breezes blown
From sunward, Joy shall voice about the woods
Her high inundant hour's infinitudes,
And rumours rife with amorous undertone.
Now passionate dim places gloom with grass
Deep under hazel arches dusk and still:
And where a drapet of dog-violet was,
White bedstraw is and golden tormentil.

* * *

My lady of all dear desire,
The year is at the full!
Mid-rapture like Midsummer breathes and sways
Of sweet things deepest done
Since bashful lips begun

When Spring came coyly to Love's long embrace.
Oh grant in dreams I may acquire
Some measure of thy grace!
Here are green grots and grassy caverns cool:
Leaves dark with verdant sleep
Where lovers' limbs may keep
That eloquence no slumber's draughts may dull.
I feel in lover-wise
Thy hand across my eyes.
Thy hair is like a sunfire through green leaves wandering:
It burns upon my brow
Like kisses lingered through
When love for very Love's sake durst nought but kiss and cling.
If thou shouldst seek to slay me now,
Sweet, would I fear the fire?
Or wake to wisdom where I dream a fool—
If thou shouldst bid me bide me
In folly, but beside thee?
My lady of all dear desire,
The year is at the full!

WAYFARINGS

I love all roads that have green sides of grass,
Where giant purple knapweeds, dark and wild,
Still nod their shaggy welcome when I pass,
Above pale clover flowers.
I used to think they loved me, as a child;
And though they have forgotten now, alas,
And now they only nod where once they smiled,
I wander there for hours.

I love such ways as lead where no one knows—
Nor cares, but I: where once the Roman trod.
Where spreading hogweed stands in stately rows,
Nor woodbine-breezes cloy.
It may be Fancy, or it may be God—
A sense is ofttimes with me then that goes,
Past where the larks their utmost song unload,
Beyond the heights of joy.

I love all goings westward when the way
Is girt about with evening; when low gleams

Are yet above dim woods, and yet the day
Lingers though night appears.
Within my soul a yearning sadness teems.
From Twilight comes it, then? From God it may.
But certain there is then with me that seems
Beyond the depths of tears.

WISLEY POND: EVENING

The evening like an echo fades: the lark
Immortal music feeds on mortal worms,
And, silent on his earthly quest employed,
Leaves one late singer to await the dark
Alone, where erstwhile hundreds had enjoyed
High feasts of sunset harmony. And swarms
Of myriad midges in frenetic maze
Dance madly down their little day to death:
The bats are busy beating through the haze:
Far off, an owl hoots somewhere in the heath.

Encircling armies of the serried pines
Close darkling up their ranks against the dusk,
Where sucks the water darkling at the sand.
Only upon the middle mere there shines
A luminous pale twilight, as they stand
With sombre breathings brooding, while the husk

Slips from them silently as time and slow.
And some there are that lost their place, to fall
Long-drowning by the margin, long ago.
Still gaunt and grey the dead limbs drip and call.

They drip, and call to me of days when here,
As boy, I saw them boldly by the edge. . . .
I did not dream to drown so near to life
Were easy, but to-night a Thing of fear
Grows plainer for the dark, a sound is rife
Of sorrow in the swart and stunted sedge. . . .
Hark! . . . . 'Twas those poplars shivering at the moon
As the wind rises with her. . . . Now it comes! . . . .
From all their ranks, as vibrant strings in tune,
The pines' own diapason moans and hums.

THE OAK IN THE FOREST

Here, when the dark her dusky glamour flings
  Across the breast of midnight's mighty trance,
I mark the beat of awful planet wings,—
Lone planets on eternal wanderings;
  And all the lapse of starry circumstance.

* * *

Where are you now,—O lives of little span
  That held Love's high communion 'neath my boughs
And leaves aflower with star-fire,—maid and man?
You loved For Ever—so your legend ran—
  And called the stars to witness lovers' vows.
Your secrets have survived you! And your love? . . . .
  If Love be only not more strong than Death,
Rest you content, you Memories that rove
Among the nights around me!—so shall prove
  Unquenched is love though quenched the lover's breath.

And you who loved a minute or an hour!
  And you who with warm eyes looked soft at
    lust
And loved in your own fashion, till the flower
You plucked had withered and its honey-dower
  Was barren and unprofitable dust!

Where are you now, while still the same old fires
  Through years of lonely travel light at last
Among my branches, cold as dead desires?
And yet . . . . the lights, the anthems, of the
    starry choirs
  Seem kinder for your calling in the past.

BEFORE A PICTURE

Grey eyes that haunt me like some distant sea
Whose echoes wreck my soul!
Cold as death is, and sure as death will be,
You watch for whom? for what? for me?
Deadly as some still shoal
Whereon strange gleams play wanly. But the night
Is not so dark as your unholy light
And your desire unnamed.
Unnamed? . . . . Who knows the anger of your spite
Shall learn the things that long your heart has claimed,
Insatiate, inwardly. . . .
Have done: weep. . . . Nay! *forgive* me, I am shamed!
Forgive me! *MISERY*.

SUMMER IN FAIRLIGHT

Fairlight! and fair the chequered darks that cloak
  Thy bosom from the wide search of the sun
With lattice leaves of ash and lichened oak,
  Where little liquid echoes lightly run
From the damp ledges of thy Dripping Well,
  By ways grown dim with fern-shadows, and spun
    Like silver threads through silence, or the sound
Of blown trees making murmur in the dell
  When trees and tide hold vague communion—
    As rumours by the sea-winds noised around.

Fairlight! and fair when Noon o'er sea and land
  Weaves her strong spells of sleep and drowsy stress
And the enchantment of her glimmering wand
  Mirage makes of the mute sea's breathlessness;—

When on the further deep the distance calls
From bloomy banks of shimmering silentness
With that mute voice that from horizons comes,
Till on the senses straining seaward falls
A lapse, wherethrough, down a blue water, press
Dream-driven craft and fleets of phantasms.

Fairlight! and fair when wealth of sunset-gold
Endows the world with Evening's large content,
For then it seems thy magic manifold
Takes on a deep, diviner element. . . .
Here—that saw once the death wings of the Dane
Beat coastwise filled of murder's fell intent—
Flows darkling by thy front of cliffs and scars
The sea that slew the murder-priests of Spain. . . .
Night comes, and Peace, on sapphire pinions blent,
Made perfect in a plenitude of stars.

A NEW YEAR'S DAY

Like silver veins that breathe maroon and mist
The birches fill The Hollow's heart unheard—
Though all the streams go murmuring to their
tryst
The pool that holds them silent afterward
Is not more still with brimful quiet now:
The winds come nowise here the hills below.

Grey copes of cloud have darkened, all day long,
The sun's face from his firstling of the year,
When silence suddenly becomes a song—
There is no more of winter anywhere!
But some strong spirit haunting solitudes
That sings its heart out from the underwoods.
Where pollard willows seem a bush on fire
For flame-bright growth of fixed resplendency
This glad ghost of a Phoenix-like desire
Makes, haply, his incarnate mystery;

Red willow-shoots that flame-like fire its joy. . . .
I have heard thrushes sing so—as a boy.

* * *

A sky more meet for deathdays than for birth:—
All day The Hollow had forgot the sun.
I went: 'twas January on the earth.
I heard: and lo, a miracle was done!
And streams that hide save for much murmuring
Took on a two-fold secret from the thing.

Whereat I sought the willow clump, to see
The spirit singing through its wattled house;
Whilst all around foregathered silently
Such strange Unknown as live behind the boughs.
They watched with me—a dusky shadow-swarm.
(Sometimes in moon-lit brakes they touch my arm.)

Then as a woman anxious with her mate
For bridal wonders grew the lonely combe:
I felt The Mother's yearning for the weight
Of sun-fired seed fill all her furrowed womb.

Primordial things, and strange prophetic heat:—
I felt her holy ardours through my feet.

* * *

Like one who in the winter of love's ruth
Lies out o' nights with his pale love, the stars,
Because some maid on earth has less of truth
And graciousness for him than nature sparse
In all that makes for heaven, there to find
In far off fire some passion to his mind,—

In things beyond, to find Life's recompense
For what the shadow, Fate, can fling on life,—
To mount on mental longings to immense
And clasp the constellations for a wife,—
To flinch no more for smart in sense of loss
Than night's blue breast that screech owls scratch
across,—

(These things are left the bosom grown forlorn,
When wisdom has forgetfulness for goal,
Whereof 'tis more to be than not be born
Though the mind turn upon and mock the soul:
'Tis very death indeed ere life has ceased
That finds the wind blow always from the east.)

So sought I there, though winter's dearth was dumb
With dreariness and trouble of the skies;
And found for boon a kindlier Voice was come
So all the world was taken by surprise
To such glad purpose that I overheard
The New Year's wonder spoken, like a word
Whose echoes breathe a blessing afterward.

LOVE LYRICS

(To a Woman.)

I dream of her throughout the day. . . .
Like clouds across the Milky Way,
That waken stars and feel the bosom stir
Of midnight 'neath their soundless flight,
In dreams my soul upon the night
Roams silent as a cloud in search of her;
And finding, finds such joy—not heaven,
Nor all its stars, has greater even!

(To Nature.)

Ah, give her to me, Mother! All my life
Is hungry for her! Oh to call her Wife!
No more I ask of thee but only this,
And I will thank thee every time we kiss!
Mother, thy heart can tell thee how I ache, I long,—
Mine does but echo thine eternal song. . . .
Why are these things, dear Mother? Tell me! Why?
I know not, no, nor wiser men than I!

A MAN'S SONG

Sundown makes me long for love.
'Tis not good to lie alone!
When the west is darkly red
And the birds prepare for bed;
When the star-drift floats above
And the woods in darkness drown,
'Tis not good to lie alone.
Sundown makes me long for love.

Sundown makes me long for love.
'Tis not good to lie alone!
Man shall strive by day; but rest
In a woman's arms is best.
Weary days more weary move
Round to nights no kisses own.
'Tis not good to lie alone.
Sundown makes me long for love!

Sundown makes me long for love.
'Tis not good to lie alone!
Love should be the end of strife.
Whoso ne'er has clasped a wife
Him shall every night reprove,
That with tender joys should crown.
Sundown makes me long for love.
'Tis not good to lie alone!

A GIRL'S SONG

In summer days
By lonely ways
I met a lad who spoke to me.
We both were young:
We did no wrong:
Nor were there eyes to see.

But what we did,
Or where we hid,
The birds alone were witness of,
Or if we both
To part were loth.
I liked him well enough.

And now I'm wed.
He may be dead.
And husbands are not always kind.
I sometimes pass
That way, alas,
And listen to the wind.

A CHILD'S SONG

Down by the mill-pool,
Ere the swallows come,
Where the water tumbles
Ever into foam,
Blooming in the springtime,
Long before the swallows,
Brave and bold,
Full of gold,
See the sunny sallows!

Down by the mill-pool,
When we're fast asleep,
Men with lighted lanterns
Round the sallows creep.
Catching 'em in hundreds—
Some as big as swallows!
Shaking moths
Into cloths,
'All along the sallows!

MICHAELMAS DAISIES
SONG

Wanly blue-and-gold beneath her golden-blue
Where SEPTEMBER'S peace has passed into the skies,
Where the quiet breath of autumn creeping through
Clothes maturing apple-garths in mellow guise,
They are blooming by the orchard, all arow.
And they mock me with the sun's peace in their eyes.
Till I seem to see you stand,
With the daisies in your hand,
In that soft September sunlight long ago.

Have you since come here to wonder why we met
In this garden-close beside the apple trees?
Do the daisies know we parted, even yet,
When their pale eyes feel them kissed on by the bees,
That they sway themselves together, to and fro,

In this golden calm, for all there is no breeze?
While I seem to see you stand,
With the daisies in your hand,
In that soft September sunlight long ago.

By the wildwood where we wandered and the stream
There are memories of an autumntide that was.
In the fern-filled hollow where we went to dream
Lie the dreams we left, that other Michaelmas.
But in places that none ever seems to know
Had in years agone a greener kind of grass,
By the orchard hedge you stand,
With the daisies in your hand,
In that soft September sunlight long ago.

SIBYLLA

(A dream, after a glimpse of the butterfly, *Limenitis Sibylla,* in a Kentish woodland.)

In wayless wildwood where such shadows meet,
Green shades that crossed the sunlight on slow feet
Moved eastward down the gold of afternoon.
Fern—where the foxglove flowers, and lizards fleet:
And bramble bosks—where bees come and commune.

The lizards fleet and flash among the fern:
With purple pride the foxgloves brood and burn:
The silver blowth of brambles in July
Wings the wild bees with rapturous return:
And with the wild bees to the woods go I.

As one who hides him—when the clouds are slow
On far off hillsides and noon's afterglow
Mounts like a scented sunfire in his brain,
Whereof warm dreams and golden come and go—
In a green place where dryads might have lain,

Or some wild nymph of woodlands lately gone
To coy in deeper coverts, who anon
May yet return, and, feeling her surprise
Grows while by mortal glances fed upon,
Seal with her mouth a sleep upon his eyes.

So, the beginning: and I found it good,
And a great store of honey in the wood—
Such sweets as man may cull from dreams for drink,
Midsummer's drowsy draughts that draw the blood
Dream-wise: they made me drunkard there, I think.

For I sat darkling in cool shadows deep;
And the dim leaves spake to me slowly—"Sleep,"
But, lest I failed of deeper dreams, her name

Of dusky wings wherefrom white wonders leap,—
"SIBYLLA": cloudy, but with stars she came.

She floated by the foxgloves; and I heard
Her name within me waken like a word
Of tender whispers told to slumber's tide.
Belike the leaves that loomed about me stirred—
Blown hair they breathed, of some warm-waking bride.

To silver shine of bramble-flower she wed
Such tremulous desire the brake, instead,
A birth of starry bloom seemed bent upon.
Awhiles I watched. . . . Dreams rose into my head
With dusk and fire of her: the sun was gone!

Then *Her* I saw,—blue darkness filled the land,—
The sky behind her, trees on either hand:
Fledged by the night she stood so, unawares—

Where dusk wings were, now by the heavens
vanned
And with intolerable delight of stars.

"Now surely she," I said, "is very fair!
The night has wrought wide pinions thus for her,
Behold, she brings stars to me by her grace!"
At that her shut eyes opened 'neath her hair,
As I drew close. It was my lady's face!

My lady who in dreams is good to me!
Of strange sweet ways she is and mystery
That with soft hands she lays love on my
eyes—
Love woven into dreams, wherethrough I see
Two lovers make them one in paradise.

No sins are in that Eden, only love:
Its seven days are full of flowers thereof,
Its seven nights—of stars to gather by;
And on the seventh there are stars enough:
My lady is as sweet as she is shy.

Therefore I durst not speak for tenderness.
I wot there are such things Love may express
By silence, as by splendour, of his wings.

There seem no stars by noonday, but they guess
Rightly, I wot, who hold there be such things.

Whereat she smiled,—her eyes with dreams unblown
Were as twin flowers by twilight overgrown
That loosens all their sweetness on the dark.
I knew she smiled from dreams where we, alone,
Lay under leaves when none there were to mark.

A veil of gauze, as fine as moonlit dew,
Lit her lithe limbs and let their longing through,
For now my lady moved, and now the brake
Clung hard upon her subtile shape anew:
I feared for her dear whiteness' tender sake.

I ne'er had known my name could sound as sweet—
She put such wistful welcome into it.
I took the thorns unheeded in my hands
And felt her grateful gladness move to meet
My lips, in ways a woman understands.

Released from out the bondage of the briers—
Unbound, she would not break from the desires
That drew our bosoms close with kindlier bond. . . .
The stars for joy redoubled all their fires;
The fern put forth her fragrance—every frond.

"Sibylla, sweet!"—the blue dark shone; the wood
Made all its leaves to murmur like our blood—
"There is no name that I may love you by
So sweet as may suffice love's amplitude." . . .
The stars sang, all together, from the sky.

"Yet, since I love, content you,"—and we kissed:
As autumn moonlight were her eyes for mist—
"My maiden-bride of many midnights! come
Winged with white stars to flutter in my breast
And melt my veins to molten honeycomb."

"Say how you love me: say it all," she said—
A whisper creeping upwards o'er her head;
That blushed because my heart-beats brought her shame,

Though wherewithal her ears were comforted
For that her body shared both bliss and blame.

Now surely God was good to me! Her throat
Leaned back half hurt beneath my hand that wrote
With sudden stain of passion on its white.
And from low lids looked forth for antidote
Eyes half ashamed surprised in their delight.

"I love you for your love and tenderness,
Your gracious ways that but rebuke to bless
The savage still in most men living lone.
I am ashamed, before such gentleness
That my desires are fiercer than your own.

"Albeit, I am constrained to keep me pure
For you, my one delight's investiture:
All of my life I am grown fain to give.
I wot death with you well I might endure—
Since if you die small wish have I to live.

"You are the grace of God in whom I trust.
Only my love is holier than my lust:
My body is aflame from every sense

To burn upon your altars, down to dust—
Yea, all my days I would do reverence."

At that my lady caught my lips to hers;
And from her mouth I felt a universe
Of starry things wax eloquent for bliss.
Unborn, from far off baffled lives and worse,
Joy came to fruit; and tears were in her kiss.

We, hand in hand, had wandered: now we sank
Into dim grass: and ferny shadows dank
With cool delight of dewfall, calm with night,
Stood sentinel about us, rank on rank,
And ash trees' plumy tops all starry-dight.

Her limbs lay fast to mine—soft limbs that shone
As clouds behind which late the moon has gone:
She loosed her hair from out its bonds and bound
My head to hers, with hands love wrought upon
So much—from sheer excess of joy I frowned.

Wherefore her gentleness was grieved, and grew
One with the night and star-filled trees and dew,
And made to kiss me so between the eyes
I felt like him long pain has stricken through—
Who finds him healed and under evening skies.

Such are my lady's lips for gentle ways—
Perfect: and he who would perfection praise
Should be more poet than am I, although
I did love-labour half my mortal days
To paint one picture of her kissing so.

Lest that my ears had heard her loving heart
Beat out too much of music for the part
That modesty bids woman's body take
In that old chorus whence Love learnt his art,
A sudden shame had sent her through the brake.

I durst not let her go for love of her,
Who is for me beyond all maidens fair,
And as are maids for men, whene'er we meet,
In those long dreams wherein she lets me wear
Her kisses, for her favoured favourite.

So that I held her like a flower; and fed
My lips upon the blossom of her head;
And kissed her eyelids down; and made her lips
Sweet silent signs for lovers newly wed—
Mute in their wait for maidenhood's eclipse.

"Sibylla!"—and, afloat adown the dark,
Old songs the morning and the evening lark
Had left, I heard, and in my pulse the pang
Of nightingales: and through my veins a spark
Of midnight's most mercurial splendour sprang—

"I would awake no more and find you not!
I am grown even as a harp, I wot,
Whereon no hands make music; but the wind,
Who lusteth while he listeth in that spot,
Comes, and leaves echo-aching strings behind."

"For very love I am grown sick of life
Without you! Yea, my body is but strife,
And all my soul is as a stricken place

Wherein wild men strive round a sleeping wife!"
I saw a change come darkling on her face—

Seen hardly now for dusk of red that dims;
Yea, one great rose, sent upwards to the brims
Of shadow sweet with hair of her: her breasts
Waxed full with fire as amorous moons: her limbs
Were lures Love laid for men in old forests.

Her wild white witchery was hardly still
In tremulous warm silence ere the will
To fly the thing she longed for left her then:
There are some dreams the twain of us fulfil
Where God is very good to lonely men.

My wildflower gathered under starry streams!
My wildwood-wife who loves me out of dreams!
My maiden-bride of ferny nights and bowers!
My lady whose white passion-flower gleams
Star-like among a cloud of sleeping-hours!

THE NOON-SPELL

Now in dense wolds of summer, dark with leaves,
The spell is working in the middle wood,—
Watched of slow clouds and seen within my blood.
O Mother Nature, now my heart perceives
And mine eyes *feel* the magic of thy mood;
That with tense passion weaves
Hushed incantations round this hour of thine
So all the earth is still. . . .
Hast thou made mute the murmur of the pine
That I may better hear this heart of mine,
"Only a cloud moves hardly from the hill"?

O Mother Nature, hearken! 'Tis the hour. . . .
Now all my being to thy breast is caught!
Bind me my brows with vision so the noon
Like some green boscage teems

(Watched far away through telescopes of thought—
As men through glass watch quiet breed afar
'Neath settled leaves of umbrages remote)
With silence and the loosestrife's purple dower;
Some grey-green island in a tide of dreams,—
A cloud of willows floating,—so it seems
Silence itself in flower.
O Mother Nature, grant in me this boon. . . .
I dare not speak thee loud. This aspen brake
Forgets to breathe for very passion's sake:
The trees have lost their tune:
And all around their leaves forget to shake
In this vast vague mid-rapture that is noon.

Loosestrife . . . . and yellow comfrey let there be
(I will lean down and listen in the fern—
So mayest thou better answer make to me)
In this dream-island hour set in noon's waveless tide . . . .
Hardly a ripple rounds it. I discern
A matron Summer—mantled as a bride
Below her in the dusks the willows cast.
Ever she sits and dreams, and at her side

The smooth, slow, silent waters eddy past.
Below, in that dark mirror of their deeps,
She is made young with Spring and bridal hope:
And where a willow weeps
Among the shade of its long hair's grey cope
Spring smiles at her; until a shadow creeps
O'er dreams in cloudy sleep now lost at last.

I know not if I sleep. . . . All things are
strange. . . .
And if the trees are real I hardly know.
Through eyes that once had watched them long
ago
In this green light I feel the shadows change. . .
In the near fields, brimful of quietness,
The drowsy kine their dusky bodies hide
Among thick shades adown the covert side,
There where the light is low . . . . .
I feel upon my face a Dryad's tress:
And in my veins the oaks their sap have breathed.
The clouds have filled my brain full of the skies.
I will lie down with all my body sheathed
In their strong sleepiness. . . .
O Mother, lay thy hand upon mine eyes.

Oh let me lose myself, myself forget,—
With thee my soul attune
Where joy is dream, lest waking be regret . . . .
Let me remember warm green places wet:—
Some glowing afternoon
Of rain and sun when May the throes of June
Felt full in her where hawthorn ardours met,
And all her bosom swoon.
Oh let me feel the Spring when Summer comes
Touch with a trance each pulse along my veins.
Or let me to far fields where idly hums
The great wild bee his drowsiest refrains. . . .
I feel thy glamour falling, falling, falling.
Now may I lose myself in thee for sure.
I hear old voices calling, calling, calling. . . .
I am become an echo, that remains,
Of suns and songs and winds and trees and rains. . . .
An echo? Yea, the Present is no more.

APRIL 15th, 1912

Feast ye and sing for a while! Night cometh, and soon shall ye sleep
In my dense dark places of death where none shall disturb you in time,
Nor the sound of the world shall come ever, till Earth shall be stricken and leap,
And the rattle of bones and of iron shall answer Catastrophe's chime.

Is it finished? So soon? Is it dark down there, O children of earth?
For most of you light shall trouble tired eyes out of sleep never more.
Yea, for some, it were kinder ye buried were, deeper than death is from birth,
Than to drift, with your death-opened eyes, where is only a sun for a shore.

Only a sun! and the stars that are suns!—letting
loose with their light ere ye left,
Haply, the night of the womb whence ye brake
into earth-light and love:
And the beams that were born ere ye brake—ye
of living and loving bereft,
Shall visit you quiet at night, and the flesh of
your bodies remove.

* * *

But a sense of a Something beyond—a shadow
of *different* stars,
Shook off my desire, and went on, neither
loving nor hating, and ran,
More swift than the wave of the world, to the
knees of its own avatars,
And stronger in silence than storm in my ears
made answer THE SPIRIT OF MAN.

IN MEMORIAM

Captain Scott and the "very gallant gentlemen" who died with him, March, 1912

Time's mysteries are MAN's chief monument:
  Truth quarried by his courage witness bears
That he may harness heaven to his bent
  Whose knowledge is the sum of all the years.
Now to earth's secret place his feet have striven!
  Where ages turn in Desolation's womb
And dearth to ghastly death-in-life is given
  To him is given glory for a tomb!
    The unapparent South
Yields up her truth in tribute to the brave:
      And from a dead man's mouth,
Above the horror of her winds that rave
With pitiless wide murder o'er his grave,
  THE SPIRIT OF MAN, undaunted, mocks his
      doom.

Honour to them! Who, 'midst the fruitless throes
Of barren birth, and monstrous ice and gloom,—
Where, hundred-leagued, the ambush of the snows
Awaits to choke with death
All fruit of mortal breath
And hide the thing MAN's lips spake ere they froze,—
Went forth for Truth and found! The whole world knows!

ABSOLUTIO: THE RELEASE OF THE DAYSPRING

Sleep, hiding in her hair the dreams of men,
  Crept from the world: the calm grey feet of morn
  Stirred on the drowsy darkness of the corn:
And August woke among the hills again.
And star by star unloaded was The Wain,
  As from his dusky penthouse they were borne;
  The whiles a daybreak-bird's indubious horn,
Reiterate, far echoed from the plain.

In that large hour the little shadows come
  And spread themselves from grass and stone and tree
  When breaks the vast wave of Expectancy,
Whose orient hush has held the dark earth dumb,
I stood on the high hills and felt the sum
  Of many shadows pass, in mine, from me.

DUSKS OF SLEEP

Came one to me along the dusks of sleep
In such a guise as made my heart of fire,—
My dream, of magic filled, as from a lyre
Touched by some vaster passion's wings that sweep
Through all the fundamental chords to reap
The madness from the music of Desire.
She, through low leaves and crimson flowers, nigher
And ever nigher to my bed did creep.

Then silence fell. I lay—like Love in trance
From extreme torture of his hour delayed—
Below the mute mad meanings of her mouth,
That filled her hair as though some April shade
Where nightingales with muted countenance
Keep watch for loves long coming from the south.

STORM IN MAY

I

Tall poplar trees that tempt a thunder-sky:
And cavernous great chestnuts girt with bloom.
And those white founts of fragrance which illume
The dark clear daylight where the hawthorns lie:
At midnight, when the moon has mounted high
And dropped her pale contagion on the gloom,
So have I seen them shine, and shadows loom
Even as now among them and as nigh.
For all the clouds draw in, by closures grey,
Till one grows dread, and darkling mutters deep;
(If God has ever spoken in His sleep
I have no doubt it was in such a way)
And through the chestnuts' arboured grottoes creep
Echoes that hush the blackbird in the may.

II

Why is the world so solemn stilly grown?
  Hardly the poplar moves in all her spire.
  And here the wan wild-parsley seems of wire,
So stiff it stands; nor any leaf has blown,
Surely, since loud that last bird's flight was flown
  A while ago. . . . Ah! Godhead of Desire!—
  The polar-loves' intolerable fire
Comes with a frightful fusion to its own! . . .
A hundred lions hide in yonder hill;
  They roar at once! The trees go frantic—
    SOUND,
  Like huge old worms that gnaw them under-
    ground,
Makes all the woods with shuddering echoes
    fill. . . .
Now on the blowth the bright shafts wreak their
    will
  As the rain's ruin dyes the grass around.

SEA-LONE

The sea speaks; and her lonely voice is heard
  With far off passion by the inland pine:
  A silence in the west grows more divine
With echoes of her immemorial word
That sadness which is sunset might have stirred—
  There, where the heart of day's deserted shrine
  Lets out its last of life incarnadine—
In her, for votive memories afterward.

For me, I wait and listen. In my blood
  She shakes the pulses with that solemn tone.
  There is some secret Time has made her own
Too long, too large: not all her maidenhood
May hide some longing hardly understood. . . .
  Or is it *I* who would not be Alone?

MATE-MAGIC

By such enchantments is my soul pursued
As, woven, might be nets for starry things,—
To take some amorous meteor as he springs
Filling half heaven with his excitement's mood
At some star fair beyond its multitude,—
So strong they come. . . . Some unseen siren sings
Within the passioned twilights of her wings
And lures men on to Love's dear hardihood. . . .
And now with immaterial meshes warm
They draw my being: scarcely I may know
Aught but—*She waits among the woods below.* . . .
In night's blue flower the starry splendours swarm
Thick with strange sweets. . . . If e'er in love be harm
God knows it was not I who made it so!

THE ELM-RIDGE

I

The west is loud with wind awake and wild
To sow a hundred paces of their lee
With ravished gold that makes a harmony
Of dying leaves to songful death beguiled.
And sometimes things but hardly reconciled,
Of frantic sorrow sudden brought to be,
From the black harp of every stricken tree
Break out in moan, or sob like to a child.
Sometimes, also, a note of music shakes
Its broken echoes o'er leaves fallen far
Among sere grass and spotted bramble brakes,
Whose deathward flight is watched by the first star.
These only from the topmost boughs are swirled. . . .
Dreams—starry-high—are scattered round the world.

II

Each side the ridge are woodlands grey and grim
  The dusk afresh clothes on with glooming shade.
  Therein are such as will not be gainsaid—
Their hour is come for spectral things and dim.
They rise when starbeams fall and quicken them
  With fires eterne that quickened man and maid
  Ere joys of life and love asleep were laid
With death, whose leaves and loves are one to him.

One shadow of two shadows breast to breast
  Now from the wood stands forth, the whiles I hear
The elm-tree harps give of their solemn best;
  Two shadows of a shade, now, like to Fear—
The love that knew no kisses knows not rest,
A cry from nightwards echoes down the west.

LEITH HILL

I

Old watcher of the ancient Street of Stane!
  Who sawest, beneath, that last of Rome go by;
  And myriad years of sunset wax and die,—
Of stricken stars by shafts of morning slain;
How many a monstrous midnight filled the plain
  With black vast seas of shadows, whence the cry
  Of baffled winds about thee and the sigh;
How moons unknown of men were wont to wane.

Old guardian of strange secrets unrevealed
  To mortal eyes and ears! thy swarthy brow,
  Night-furrowed 'neath the starry Titan's plough,
Hath knowledge in what wise the pathless Weald

Gloomed, when afar his hate the mammoth
squealed. . . .
And I may lie within thy bosom now.

II

The larch and pine with ocean commune keep
Of immemorial moment—talk that flows
Out of a time that saw how waters rose
And fell, with all the passion of the deep
Hungry before thee to yon southern steep
Where that far Southdown shadow comes and
goes.
And the gorse flames, and here the heather
glows,
Till the years climb upon thy knees to sleep.

Oft have I felt toward thee from afar
Out of the south! Yea, I have heard thee call
When thy great head beneath the northern star
Hath nodded through some solemn evening's
pall,
As I have drawn me nearer, and to me
Seemed like a friend strong in large sympathy.

MOONTIDE

Now her inundant coming laps the hill;
And the strong argent of the moontide's flush
Spreads out along autumnal ranks of rush;
While the stiff tawny sedges standing still
Pass each by each obedient sentinel
The watchword of the night's translucid hush. . . .
And starry craft—that sometimes westward push
Slow prows all night across the pool and fill
Its furlong with a myriad leagues of heaven—
Fade like to phantoms. . . . Now a white owl goes
Through broad oblivions down his ghostly beats
Where white waves drown the starry craft by fleets. . . .
Oft have I watched the pool when the moon rose:
I see the owl hide in its moonlight even.

AD INFINITUM

Blown cloud-rack brings a beauty to the stars:
  And loud the long night labours without rest
To this high worship of her avatars
  Through dim reverberant archways of the west.
Now do the clamant winds that dusk the skies
  Each sitting splendour with their incense move;
Heaven hears, and glides, and opes and shuts its eyes:
  Space echoes with a Universe in love.

The Spirit of zodiacal Desire,
  Whose midmost shrine intolerably is there,
Draws, as a dance draws, her irradiate choir
  With planetary passion in her hair.
My soul, above the earth-wind's wanderings
Caught up, communes with her, the Soul of Things.

NOVEMBER

A song-bird, silent, by a beamless sun
  Sits where the winds fall dead beyond each leaf,
  Dank with slow-weeping, motionless, veiled grief,
November drops about her, one by one.
Here brackens break their stubborn hearts upon
  The swarthy memories of green joys—as if
  For days that bound their glowing emerald sheaf
With dim delights of dewfall—past and done.

The dusky breath of woodlands pales and glooms:
  Strange shadows meet and part across the wild:
  And through the mist—as quiet as a child

Grown solemn at a darkling place of tombs—
Life watches death. . . . There comes a Mystery
Like ghosts at night that haunt one from the sea.

TO MRS. HYNDMAN

July 1st, 1913

Mother of those whose need of mothering
Made them your children! By your open grave
High summer speaks with voice tall poplars have
At noon, and larks have found a place to sing,
Though round July's blue mirror coil and cling
The factory's dark breath. For you, who gave
Love-labour, yet more men shall live to save
The seed of men from Mammon's harvesting.
Wherefore I think you would not have us weep
That stand together here and in the sun
Look last on you, who from long labour won
This quiet ground's full heritage of sleep,
But tears within the heart would have us keep
That human love like yours grows fresh upon.

LABOUR UNREST

I met men going loudly through the land:
And each man his mouth the clarion
Of Truth. I hearkened things ere they were gone
That any fool, they said, could understand.
Meseemed it came about the earth was planned
So men might Profits make e'en from the sun.
(Of shining bright examples there were none
More clear or ready to man's eye or hand.)
Thus was the sun a sign, for high emprise
Set forth in heaven, and for earth reward.
Nay! Christ, they call God's son, put in His word
For Caesar, with the tribute in His eyes.
(Thereat some fools made answer in surmise.
That patient men would come to curse the Lord.)

II

But if it be (as some have hardly guessed)
  Exalted gold begets a kindred creed
  Whose votive hands grow gradually to greed,
May CAPITAL not bear SELF-INTEREST?
For him who now fulfils his faith the best,
  What shall be said? Has he not sown the seed?
  Has not the harvest fruit for him indeed?
For him the sun shall rise along the west.
Or,—hate shall be his guerdon who has sown
  Hatred, for love of gold,—who mouthing Christ,
    That poor men may keep heaven for their shares,
Does blasphemy against that orient throne
  Where Truth restores the psychic palimpsest
    Till Manhood's meaning rises on the years.

MAMMON

Hypocrisy's arch-thief of Souls! thy birth
Was bestially begotten in this wise:—
Thy dam for lust of Gold lay down with Lies
To found a brothel's dynasty for earth;
That honest lust she might debauch, and dearth
Be purer passion's portion; as the skies
Through lips of falsehood in the priest's disguise
Mocked mundane life of souls for little worth.
Apotheosised pimp! by grace of greed
Grown godhead, till of Man thou shalt be slain!
With gods that scorned, and helped thee in thy need
By vile impostures on the poor, remain
For meaning, that the Soul of Man may know
Their truth begat their final overthrow.

"WHILE HUMAN NATURE'S WHAT IT IS"

When Neolithic craniums were smashed
  By celts of stone the same excuse was found
  Among the philosophic gathered round,
And brains with social epigram were dashed.
Ofttimes the penny-pundits' pens have splashed
  This ink of instinct broadcast with a sound
  Of many engines moistening such ground
As once the prehistoric rains had plashed.

Were Human Nature other than it were
  In places long forgotten by the sun,
The phantom men call Progress might appear,
And the soul's life, now narrow as the seas,
  Might broaden into drinking-troughs—begun
In vain while Human Nature's what *it is.*

BLASPHEMY LAWS

Earth waits for Justice while men watch the sky.
  Bound by the throat she lay, as with a cord,
  Her darkening lips from priestcraft's gripe abhorred
Sending along the years their stifled cry
For man to put her shameful slaying by.
  Now at the light of Truth's revolted sword
  Another god goes like an overlord
Who has outlived the terror of his eye.

Who claim to have the word of Deity
  Anent some future heaven shall go forth
  Themselves into the future—things for mirth:
No vaunt so vain as their humility,
As much a jest as Jove has come to be,
  For men who claim a larger life on earth.

"RED ENGLAND"

"Imagination and Property go together. . . ."
Vide the above book issued by an anti-socialist organization.

This then is Truth of Wisdom! For such end
Christ crucified hung bleeding from the cross.
Imagination fires but its own loss
That may not wealth of Fortune's fuel spend.
That soul may rise whose wings for gain descend.
And poets who have sung of Mammon's dross
Have brains as poor in blowth as arctic-moss
Beside the tropic grandeurs gold has penned.
This thing for Truth of Souls! by Property
Man justifies his making, and his God's.
Lest Avarice should fail for avatars
Shall Dividends behold Divinity
Through eyes of nobler ardours than the clod's—
Whose guineas glow scarce brighter than the stars.

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